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Cc: Susan M <susanmmortimer@hotmail.com>
Date: 02/14/2023 06:43 PM
Subject: CDBG Grant Sub-Committee Meeting Wednesday February 15, 2023 (HCA- "Civic Engagement Coordinator")

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Dear Ms. Muszynski and Members of the Sub-Committee,

I have been given to understand that a request from the **Housing Corporation of Arlington** is before you for tomorrow night's meeting. The HCA is asking for **\$50,000 to fund the position of "Civic Engagement Coordinator"**.

Will HCA's "Civic Engagement Coordinator" in actuality be a "Tenant Organizer"? If so, I strongly oppose the use of CDBG funds for such a purpose. HCA is a landlord. Landlords should never organize tenants; that is absurd. The idea that HCA would request block grant funds to do so is even worse.

By approving \$50,000. (or any amount) for HCA to hire staff to 'mentor' those it houses the Town would be collaborating in a highly questionable arrangement. Do HCA and the Town believe that tenants would be free to speak their minds to staff of an entity that owns and manages their homes and determines their rents?

There are many grass-roots institutions in the Boston area who help to organize renters' associations. One highly regarded group is Vida Urbana/City Life; much of its work is volunteer.

My interest in this request was piqued because I ran a highly regarded homelessness prevention program in Somerville in the early 2000s and was an HCA tenant at Capitol Square for more than four years from 2016 through 2020. My experience there was quite an education.

HCA's tenant representative while I lived in its housing was not elected, but rather appointed by the director. That was a conflict of interest. I am also more than happy to share documentation of conditions therein, the response from management to tenants' concerns (such as code violations) and the inaction of HCA long-time board members when such concerns were brought before them in person, in writing and emails. (Though Pamela Hallett is no longer its director, most of HCA's board remains in place.)

I am aware that HCA is presently leafleting its buildings and repeatedly urging tenants in person and in writing to sign up for tenant representative training sessions.

Giving HCA CDBG money to hire a tenant organizer would certainly not improve matters and could conceivably make them worse. ***Landlords should never run tenant associations!*** I urge the Sub-Committee not to approve the request by the Arlington Housing Corporation for funds to hire a "Community Engagement Coordinator".

Thank you. I apologize for submitting my comments so late, but I have only learned that the Sub-Committee was meeting Wednesday morning. I have signed up to attend virtually.

Yours truly,

Susan Mortimer
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Arlington