

**STATEMENT OF
Rolando A. Andrew, Chief Executive Officer
Breathe DC Inc.
BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH
Chairperson Yvette Alexander
DC COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
DC DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH FY 2015 BUDGET REQUEST &
DC DEPARTMENT OF BEHAVIORAL HEALTH FY 2015 BUDGET REQUEST**

May 1, 2014

Good morning Chairperson Alexander and Members of the Committee on Health. I am Rolando Andrew, the Chief Executive Officer for Breathe DC. Breathe DC's mission is to ensure that every breath counts by promoting healthy lifestyles and preventing lung disease, through advocacy, education, and program services, especially in communities affected by health disparities. Our offices are located in ward 8 within the United Medical Center. Breathe DC also serves as an active member organization of the DC Tobacco Free Coalition and the DC Asthma Coalition.

Asthma continues to be a major health problem in the District. It affects over 18,000 children and 52,000 adults in DC. Asthma is the leading cause of emergency room visits for children at a rate of 42%. The total cost to the District, including productivity losses due to morbidity, mortality, and incremental number of days lost from work and school, is estimated to be more than \$60 million;

Breathe DC calls for the District to invest in a comprehensive campaign to address the asthma epidemic. Starting this month (Asthma Awareness Month), we will be developing a major DC Asthma Campaign "Lifting the Burden." We call on all sectors of the community including the DC Department of Health to join us as we work to end the devastating effects of this dreadful disease.

The harm caused by cigarette smoking is devastating. It is the only product that if used as intended, will kill. Each year more than 700 adults over 35 years old die in the District.

To address the prevalence of asthma in the District, it is imperative that we invest in tobacco prevention and cessation. Many children suffering from asthma live with people that smoke. As the rates of asthma have steadily increased, so has the number of smokers in the District. The 2012 statistics from the CDC, reveal that the number of smokers in the District (19.6%) is now higher than the national average of 18%, and the rates climb to a high of 37% in Wards 7 and 8 where chronic disease is highest in the city.

We join our voice to the DC Tobacco Free Coalition and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommendation that the District should allocate at least \$10.7 million to create a Tobacco Prevention and Cessation Dedicated Fund. The funds will fund a comprehensive approach including, cessation, prevention, media, and policy.

In addition, we call for a ban on smoking for all multi dwelling housing in the District. It is of vital importance to address second hand smoke in multi-dwelling communities. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there are over 260,000 occupied housing units in the District, of which 61% are multi-dwelling properties (2 or more units in the development). The Surgeon General concluded that secondhand smoke causes lung cancer, heart disease and triggers acute effects including coughing, wheezing, breathlessness, and brief exposure to secondhand smoke which can trigger an asthma attack in children with asthma. Secondhand smoke can cause sudden infant death syndrome and other health consequences in infants and children.

Finally, we need more enforcement for our building codes to address pest management practice, by managers of multifamily dwellings. Information gathered through Breathe DC's home visit program to the households of children with asthma reveal that rodent infestation and a gross absence of pest control remains a major health barrier for children living in the District with asthma. Breathe DC's Breathe Easy Program provides environmental education, and tools to improve the health outcomes of children and families with asthma. Our interventions require a city-landlord collaboration in order to reach their maximum efficiency, and to ensure that prompt action is taken to address pest issues in multifamily dwellings. We need designated inspectors who can cite landlords who violate building codes. Currently there remains little capacity to ensure compliance in this area.

We thank you for your commitment to a healthier Washington, DC and encourage DC residents to Quit for the Health of It.