



COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
JOHN A. WILSON BUILDING
1350 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE, NW
WASHINGTON, DC 20004

JANESE LEWIS GEORGE
Councilmember, Ward 4

COMMITTEE MEMBER
Human Services
Labor and Workforce Development
Recreation, Libraries and Youth Affairs
Transportation and the Environment
Special Committee, COVID-19 Recovery

November 22, 2022

Karl Racine
Attorney General, Office of the
400 6th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Attorney General Racine:

I write to request that you pursue a Nuisance Abatement case against Petra Management for the adverse impact that their property, 5616 13th Street NW, is causing on tenants of the property and the surrounding community. Pursuant to D.C. Code § 42-3101, *et seq.*¹ the Office of the Attorney General is empowered to file a lawsuit against properties that are being used to sell, store, or manufacture illegal drugs that are causing an “adverse impact” including arrests of persons on or near the property², search warrants served or executed at the property³, a substantial number of complaints made to law enforcement and other government officials about alleged illegal activity⁴, as well as other conditions. All of these qualifying circumstances are present at this property.

Last week I met with Mr. Rashid Salem, the principal owner of Petra Management. My office has been in touch with his on-site property management staff for months, following a series of unresolved community concerns. I *asked in good faith* that he remedy these concerns without requiring court intervention. Unfortunately, Mr. Salem refused. I echoed the requests of surrounding neighbors that Petra repair their front door (which does not lock properly) and provide on-site security or concierge services. Mr. Salem said they could not afford it. Petra is in the process of rehabilitating and leasing up the property across the street, 5601 13th Street NW, and neighbors are concerned that Petra has not shown a willingness to ensure this second property will operate safely either.

A successful nuisance case can, via court order, require that the owner remedy these conditions. Specifically, I am seeking the following relief:

D.C. § 42–3110. Relief. “(b) Any order issued under this section may include the following relief ... (3) Ordering the owner to make reasonable expenditures upon the property, including the installation of secure locks, hiring private security personnel, increasing

¹ The Drug-Related Nuisance Abatement Act of 1998, effective March 26, 1999 (D.C. Law 12-194; D.C. Official Code § 42-3101 *et seq.*)

² DC Code § 42–3101(1)(H)

³ DC Code § 42–3101(1)(I)

⁴ DC Code § 42–3101(1)(J)

lighting in common areas, and using videotaped surveillance of the property and adjacent alleys, sidewalks, or parking lots.”⁵

The court can also order that all rental income from the property be placed in an escrow account for up to 90 days or until the drug-related nuisance is abated⁶ or that a trustee be appointed by the court to use rental income to make reasonable expenditures related to the property to abate the nuisance conditions⁷ as well as any other remedy that the court deems appropriate⁸. I believe legal intervention is necessary at this point to ensure Petra improves their operations. Without meaningful improvements, security issues at the property will continue to escalate and put the health and safety of residents at risk.

Petra leases most or all of its units to residents receiving Department of Human Services (DHS) or DC Housing Authority (DCHA) voucher subsidy. Many of these residents require additional support services including case work, addiction counseling, mental health services, and health care. I believe we should do more to support these residents with on-site services and care by mandating that these services be made available on-site in properties where a large number or concentration of eligible recipients reside together. I plan to craft legislation to this effect in the next Council Period.

Companies that profit from our community have a responsibility to do their part in maintaining the health and safety of our neighbors. Petra has failed to be a good steward to its tenants or a good neighbor to those surrounding the 5616 13th Street NW property. They should be held to account for their actions, which may be part of a larger pattern. Petra owns several other properties in Ward 4, including three buildings at 14th and Quincy Street NW. My team recently did a wellness check at these properties and found the doors at all three properties to be unsecured, which is concerning given that there is well-documented and substantial drug-related activity at this intersection, including an incident from January where a police officer was shot while responding to an illegal drug sale call. I encourage your office to pursue any and all investigations to ensure this company operates safely.

I appreciate your support in pursuing this case with all due speed and attention.

Sincerely,



Janeese Lewis George
Ward 4 Councilmember

Cc: Vanessa Rubio, ANC 4C01
Kevin Donahue, City Administrator
Brian Schwalb, Attorney General-Elect

⁵ DC Code § 42-3110(b)(3)

⁶ DC Code § 42-3110(b)(4)

⁷ DC Code § 42-3110(b)(5)

⁸ DC Code § 42-3110(b)(6)