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**D.C. City Council Committee on Human Services, June 11, 2003**  
**Testimony by Najiya Shana'a, Executive Director, Neighbors' Consejo**

Good morning Council Member Committee Chair Sandy Allen. My name is Najiya Shana'a and I am the Executive Director of Neighbors' Consejo. I am here as a member of the D.C. Substance Abuse Services Coalition and in solidarity with DC residents now in recovery and with the thousands of people in our city who are becoming sicker and sicker without treatment.

Neighbors' Consejo is the only all day, six days a week intensive certified substance abuse treatment program for dual diagnosis limited English speaking homeless Latinos in Washington, D.C.

In Columbia Heights and Mt. Pleasant, and across the city, men and women have made the decision to stop using and abusing drugs and alcohol. They have surrendered themselves to physical withdrawal, and intense self examination. It is at this moment, the moment of their difficult decision, that D.C. has denied her people the right to recovery.

On May 8, 2003 Neighbors' Consejo clients were turned away from APRA's Central Intake Division; we were informed that vouchers would no longer be distributed for services due to funding limitations. Since that time we have been repeatedly told by various APRA administrators that we would receive notice directly from APRA within 1-2 days about the status of treatment funding for the remainder of the fiscal year. APRA has failed to give us any notice and has not communicated with Neighbors' Consejo about this issue since May 19<sup>th</sup>. We have yet to be reimbursed for any of the vouchers invoiced to APRA since December 2002.

Neighbors' Consejo could not and would not close the door on the men who were denied intake last month. We had accompanied them in their respective struggles against their addictions through outreach and counseling. Most recently we've learned that D.C. Central Detox will no longer accept narcotic users, including PCP and crack cocaine addicts. How are we to provide intensive treatment with no appropriate detox services? Sixty-percent of Neighbors' Consejo current case load is poly-user. They are fighting against the combined addiction to heroine, crack cocaine, alcohol and marijuana. We are now faced with an agonizing decision. Do we make plans now to limit outreach to potential clients and shut down our treatment program? Do we take our services elsewhere?

Neighbors' Consejo became certified by APRA and developed a Human Care Services Agreement with APRA in good faith. We believed that with enough City Council oversight the administration would not turn its back on the most vulnerable residents in our city, the mothers and fathers, daughters and sons who are addicted and alone— isolated from health and other support services. Your leadership remains as indispensable as ever to prevent an explosive human crisis.

Our clients can't afford nor do they deserve any more set-backs in their hard work to overcome addiction. I respectfully ask you, members of the City Council, what you will continue to do in your position of power to intervene on behalf of the more than 60,000 residents and their family members affected by drugs and alcohol. The system must be available and working for people when they choose to seek treatment.

I ask you to do everything in your power to make this issue a city priority and breathe new life into D.C.'s substance abuse treatment systems before fronting money for entertainment. We will receive much more in return. Attached to this testimony, please find a time line covering Neighbors' Consejo relations with APRA since the implementation of the Choice in Treatment Act in July 2000. I would now like to introduce you to Dr. Federico Castañon with our specific recommendations.