



MEMORANDUM

To: The Honorable President and Members of the Baltimore City Council
c/o Natawna Austin, Executive Secretary

From: Alice Kennedy, Acting Housing Commissioner 

Date: April 20, 2021

Re: City Council Resolution 21-0017R Investigative Hearing - Arson and Fire Fatality Awareness: Re-instituting the Baltimore City Joint Agency Arson Task Force

The Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) has reviewed City Council Resolution 21-0017R for the purpose of inviting representatives from the Baltimore City Fire Department, the Baltimore Police Department, the Office of the State's Attorney for Baltimore City, the Baltimore City Health Department, the Baltimore City Department of Housing and Community Development, the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice, the Baltimore City Public School System, and the Mayor's Office of Homeless Services to appear before the City Council to discuss arsons, fire fatalities and injuries, and school fires; how we can work to re-institute the Joint Agency Arson Task Force; and discuss other tools that would assist in the prevention or prosecution of arson.

DHCD takes several measures to improve fire safety throughout the City. DHCD's Code Enforcement and Inspections unit works to enforce the Building, Fire and Related Codes and the International Property Maintenance Code by issuing notices and citations for interior and exterior sanitation and safety issues, which left unabated, could lead to the increased risk of fire. Code Enforcement Inspectors perform inspections for possible violations at the request of owners, neighbors and tenants in addition to requests generated through the 311 system and pro-active inspections. The inspections team also gets referrals from other City agencies, such as Police and the Health Department, to investigate potential issues that are brought to their attention such as cases of hoarding, vacant buildings inhabited by squatters and accumulation of hazardous trash and debris. Vacant buildings are particularly vulnerable to fire and arson and DHCD works closely with the Baltimore City Department of Public works to quickly identify and board buildings that are open to casual entry. Inspectors can issue emergency notices for code enforcement violations which require that the issue be corrected within a certain timeframe. Depending on the type of violations that are identified it could result in the property being vacated until the violations are corrected.

DHCD's Office of Permits and Plans Review ensures that new construction and rehabilitation work is properly planned to meet all Building, Fire and Related Codes and that the proper reviews are conducted by the Baltimore City Fire Department (BCFD) prior to any permits being issued. The reviews include compliance with safety requirements such as; sprinkler systems,



smoke detectors, fire alarms, clear exit paths, proper signage and the use of fire-retardant construction materials.

DHCD's Rental Inspections Program adds inspection and rental licensing requirements for all non-owner occupied single-family dwellings. This inspection requirement adds an additional layer of protection for tenants. Fire related items required in the inspection include that electrical live wires are not visible in living areas, electrical outlets are protected by cover plates, electrical outlets in areas where water is generally present are Ground Fault Interrupter protected, lighting fixtures are functional; and switches protected by cover plates and smoke detectors are properly installed and operational. These inspections could reduce the number of fire related deaths due to electrical issues or lack of smoke detectors.

The Baltimore City Fire Department (BCFD) previously established a Joint Agency Arson Task Force which included various agencies committed to combating the root causes of fires. DHCD is committed to supporting the work of BCFD and sister agencies to re-institute the Task Force and discuss other policies that would assist in the prevention or prosecution of arson.

DHCD **supports** the passage of City Council Resolution 21-0017R.

AK/sm

cc: Ms. Themelis, Nina, *Mayor's Office of Government Relations*

Brandon M. Scott, Mayor • **Alice Kennedy**, Acting Housing Commissioner

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