



June 14, 2022

Testimony in Support of City Council Bill 22-0207 – Vacant Building Notices

Dear Chair Middleton and Members of the Economic and Community Development Committee:

I am writing in support of City Council Bill 22-0207 – Vacant Building Notices, which will provide much needed support to address the problem of vacant properties in Baltimore.

I am an attorney at Community Law Center, a nonprofit organization which provides free legal services to nonprofit and community organizations in Baltimore. Our clients and the neighborhoods we work with consistently identify vacant properties among the most pressing issues they face. Vacant buildings are a public health risk and eyesore for the surrounding neighborhood, pose a danger to passersby and neighboring properties (particularly adjoining properties like rowhomes), attract crime and illegal dumping, lower neighboring property values, and disproportionately use City resources like police, fire, and code enforcement. Vacant properties in many Baltimore communities have been vacant for years, and the owners have walked away from the property and any responsibility for its maintenance. These vacant properties may have received only one Vacant Building Notice in those years, with an accompanying fine. Unfortunately, a single notice and fine may not be enough to get the property owner's attention and incentivize them to take action on the property.

This bill would give new tools for code enforcement, by increasing the fine for failure to abate a Vacant Building Notice and making each day a potential new violation, with the potential for a new fine. This will incentivize property owners to take action to abate the vacant building notice. If the property owner continues to fail to take action, the code violations and fines on the property will make the property eligible for a code enforcement tool called Judicial In Rem Foreclosure, in which the City can foreclose on a property if liens on the property (including unpaid fines from code violations and citations) exceed its assessed value. Using this tool, the City can foreclose on a vacant, abandoned property and return it to productive use.

Community Law Center supports 22-0207. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Shana Roth-Gormley

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