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Testimony

23-0153R – Investigative Hearing – Vacant Building Water Shutoffs

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony for City Council Resolution 23-0153R Investigative Hearing – Vacant Building Water Shutoff. I am humbly requesting your support for this legislation.

Section 116.4.6 of the Baltimore City Building Code states:

“Notice to Public Works. Whenever the Building Official determines a structure to be vacant, the Building Official must promptly notify the Director of Public Works of that determination. On receipt of the notice, the Director of Public Works must proceed to cut off water service”.

Currently, very few vacant properties with Vacant Building Notices (“VBN”) have had their water turned off unless there were pipes bursting or other hazards. Refusing to shut off the water immediately when a VBN is issued causes multiple concerns including:

- In the colder temperatures, these properties are unheated and often pipes burst, causing damage within the property and any adjacent properties as well.
- Once a vacant property may be rehabbed, the costs of repairs skyrocket when water damage is present. In fact the property becomes even less desirable when water damage, mold, and other effects of water are present.
- When pipes burst, the Department of Public Works and the Baltimore Fire Department are called upon to shut off the water, which uses city resources in times when many of these resources are needed elsewhere.

Since this resolution was introduced right after the Christmas holiday, the Department of Housing and Community Development and the Department of Public Works have been working on the protocols for implementation of the law outlined in the Building Code. This hearing will be an opportunity for both departments to report on their work so far, and when we can see that the water will be shut off.

Respectfully Submitted:

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