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Baltimore City Council  
100 Holliday Street  
Baltimore MD21202

**Re: Haring in support of establishing a Baltimore City Department of Aging**

Dear Committee Members:

My name is Sarah Matthews, Founder and Co-Chair of the Empowerment Team. I'm seeking justice for myself and all residents living in senior residential housing communities throughout the State of Maryland. Public outcry and political advocacy are critical to remedy the problems in senior housing.

As a point of reference, some 23 publicly subsidized rental complexes in Baltimore were privatized during the Rawlings administration. Residents of these dwellings were denied the right to participate and give voice to this process. Instead, the Public Housing Group under leadership of Reginald Scriber was instructed to sign the recommendation to lease twenty-three buildings to private landlords, management companies, and developers (some located outside of Maryland). According to Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake, this disposition was due to the fact that Baltimore City couldn't afford to make the necessary repairs in these 23 buildings. As a result, 30-year leases were awarded to private developers and Real Estate Companies to apply for repair funding. However, It appears, they only addressed aesthetic repairs while leaving more vital public safety, environmental and public health concerns(i.e. inoperable elevators, sewage and plumbing backups, verbal and physical assault and bullying of residents) unaddressed.

According to housing data, owners and managers such as Edgewood Management, Somerset Development, Penrose, and several private landlords fosters an atmosphere which allows the managers in senior residential housings to abuse, bully and neglect the needs of older adult tenants. As well, many of these buildings are mixed use and allow younger disabled individuals to rent units. Many occupants in this category are active substance abusers and or drug dealers and breed an environment of constant, open drugs activity and prostitution that is ignored and unchecked by management. Although this behavior is unacceptable, it exists in approximately ninety percent of the senior residential housings' complexes in Baltimore City. Oftentimes, It's the same landlords that commit or permit such egregious behavior are those who receive tax

credits, section eight vouchers, federal, state and city funds as well as other funds to provide fair and affordable housing to older adults.

Below, I outline several issues residents endure in most of these complexes throughout Baltimore City. Additionally, I detail adverse actions directed toward me by Somerset Development and Habitat America Ownership acting in concert at my Linden Park Apartment residence.

### **1. Threats (verbal and physical), Bullying:**

Managers working in senior residential housing communities bully residents by threatening them with eviction! Therefore, residents are afraid to report or speak up in any manner concerning violations and mistreatment. The residents at Linden Park Apartments residents are afraid to report their manager, Colleen Palmer or Sandy Kendall (VP of Habitat for America). Currently, I am being threatened with eviction as a retaliatory measure due to my constant, filed complaints, and advocacy for older adult rights, and violations in living conditions.

### **2. Security and Theft of personal property:**

According to some of the older adults, a large amount of their personal property is lost via theft suspiciously with no forced entry into their apartments. Prostitution is among the contributors to the security risk created by male residents, specifically during monthly check time. In addition, the young disabled men are primarily responsible for selling drugs in some of the senior residential housings which has become a security crisis for this vulnerable population. The ownership refuses to hire any form of security for some of these buildings even though there is documented crime.

A lack of security in most of these complexes is alarming and should be a priority concern of the management staff, as indicated by the unfortunate violent death of a female resident inside of her apartment at Monte Verde Senior Apartments in Park Heights.

At Linden Park Apartments on May 26, 2017 (we) residents were held hostage inside of the front corridor by a man wielding a machete. Manager Colleen Palmer left out the side door and went home without regard to a safe outcome for residents. Cameras at Linden Park are for cosmetic purposes only and they are inoperable.

### **3. Federal Violations and Misuse of Funds:**

In some residences, Managers receive monthly bonuses to keep the building at full occupancy. This fuels ungrounded evictions, abuse, and neglect of older adults. This human condition needs immediate attention by the federal, state and city governments. At Linden Park residents are paying for repairs that should be taken care of by management in addition, section eight vouchers are illegally used for and against residents.

### **4. Interference and Violation of Tenants Right to Assemble and Autonomy in Decision Making:**

Tenant Association Presidents must agree to inform manager what is being discussed in the meetings otherwise, one cannot serve in this capacity. This violates all confidentiality standards and prevents residents from having a safe space to express concerns.

Ms. Palmer dictates who the tenant association president will be. Without discussion with the board, Colleen Palmer signed and submitted a receipt for the Tenant Association president who lied and stole money from the treasurer. That president was voted out of office. I became President. Mrs. Palmer and Sandy Kendall (VP-Habitat) manipulated me out of the presidency in favor of Palmer's friend, the current Vice-President of the tenant association. She blackmails tenants who she does favors for, instructing them to snitch on their neighbors.

## 5. Nepotism – Conflict of Interest

Several of Ms. Palmer's immediate family members (including her husband) are employed at Linden Park Apartments and work under her direct supervision. This presents a conflict of interest and adds to the increased biased attitude against older adults which occurred with her husband, James and me on the elevator.

## 6. Environmental Hazards and Public Health concerns

Many residents in my building (Linden Park) are experiencing **respiratory problems**. I promised one of the residents who passed away, that I would share her concerns. According to her, she didn't have a respiratory illness until she moved into Linden Park Apartments. During a Tenants Association meetings, one of the residents said that he was very ill due to a respiratory problem he developed after moving into Linden Park Apartments. According to him, he has lost 35lbs since moving into Linden Park. I had asthma prior to moving in, however since moving into this building, my doctor filled my inhaler prescription 10 times more in a one-year period due to the increased number of asthma attacks was experiencing. In an attached photograph, I'm standing outside at 5am experiencing an asthma attack. Instead of enforcing the no smoking policy, the manager simply ignored my pleas for help until my physician wrote Somerset Development informing them that my life was at risk.

*According to BG&E, there is **unidentified gaseous chemical** in the pipes connected to the laundry room. This emission seeps and flows directly through my living room window above.*

The trash room is not maintained causing pile up, compacter jams, and a stench in addition, we have had several rodent and bed bug infestations. A failing plumbing infrastructure causes sewage back-up and flooding in apartments introducing hazardous waste into an already vulnerable population environment.

## 7. Elders in Need of Assistance – Welfare Check

Over the past 3 to 5 years, I have submitted both verbally and in writing more than 40 inquires of concern and complaints of noise emanating from my neighbor's apartment directly above my unit. There is a 11p.m. noise ordinance in the city of Baltimore. My complaints are well within this timeframe. However, Mrs. Palmer refuses to cite this tenant for lease (noise) violations. What is even more distressing is that my neighbor lives alone and has not physically left her apartment in 3.5 years until I reported in to BCDSS. She rarely if ever has visitors. I have requested that a welfare check or adult protective services provide some level of intervention to

ensure her physical and mental well-being. All my efforts to advocate on her behalf have been met with either penalties against me citing harassment of a neighbor, or complete dismissal.

This consistent behavior by my neighbor of banging on the floor and dragging objects from room to room begins around 11pm and continues into the early morning (5am). My own mental health and wellness is impacted, and on more than a dozen occasions, I have had to physically leave my residence in order to sleep. Based on my prior and current experience working with and advocating for older adult, I believe my neighbor to be a vulnerable adult in need of assistance. Yet, Ms. Palmer has continued to dismiss and neglect to address the basic health and safety needs of both me and my neighbor.

### **8. Building Infrastructure and (Elevators and Windows)**

The elevators at Linden Park are often disabled. Residents are stuck frequently until the fire department arrives. Its no secret the fear and trauma endured by residents due to malfunctioning or inoperable elevators. Residents have had to sleep in the lobby, a disabled resident (at the Lakeview Towers – Fox 45) had to leave his wheelchair and crawl to the 11<sup>th</sup> floor. At a September 11, 2018, Tenants' Association Meeting complaints of faulty window installation were reported, according to the residents at Linden Park complained at their association meeting that they too have air coming from their window. I have management to put plastic over my windows and because I make this yearly request, they put plastic up that I cannot see of out which doctor stated that brand of plastic isn't a good idea due to my asthma.

### **9. Manipulation of Lease Terms/ Legal Intimidation to Force Eviction**

Currently, I am being threatened with eviction. In attached letters from the Attorney for Somerset Development states that I'm accused of material breach of lease (paraphrase) 'engaging in aggressive and threatening behavior toward management and staff'

The **first NOTICE** dated July 28, 2021, is a demand for me to cease all verbal communication with staff and management. This was prompted after an incident involving James and I (manager's husband). In July 2021 during the height of COVID-19, policy was clearly posted on the elevators stating only one person on elevator unless you were from the same family and masks were required. However, James violated this policy by forcing himself onto the elevator. I was on the elevator first. His force resulted in my cart being pushed into my rib cage causing me bodily harm. I called the police to file a report. However, the officers knew James, and in effect nothing was done to address this incident on my behalf. Additionally, James erased the footage where he had pushed the cart into my side. He then filed a bogus complaint against me which misrepresented the facts. The accounts and accusations as outlined in the attached letter are false and misguided.

### **The second NOTICE – Eviction (Letter from Somerset Attorney dated December 12, 2022)**

On November 22, 2022, I arranged Thanksgiving Baskets delivery to every resident at Linden Park Apartments. The distribution took place in the Community Room. The new Assistant Manager entered the community room without introducing herself. She demanded that we sign a document to receive the food. She never read the form, explained what the form entailed, or

why were we being asked to sign for donations that I had arranged. This had never occurred in the past. I asked her why she was requiring us to sign a document? I also stated that we had never been required to sign any disclosure in the past 8 years that I have been living at Linden Park Apartments. When I informed her of this, she yelled at me and told me to shut up! 'I'm not talking to you. I responded, "shut your big fat ass up too."

Ms. Kelly Davis was my contact for the donation that was delivered to the residents not Linden Park Apartments or Habitat of America. Beyond defending myself verbally, I didn't nor have I ever directed profanity of the magnitude stated in the attached notice toward any staff, management, or other owner representative associated with Linden Park Apartments. Again, the accounts and accusations as outlined in this Notice of Eviction are false and misguided. Additionally, at no time has my communication with or concerning staff or management arisen to a level to justify material breach of lease as outlined in the attached notice.

This is a direct retaliatory attack toward me due to my continued efforts to advocate for the rights of older adults. In addition to the above referenced incidents, a Linden Park Apartment staff has physically assaulted me. The manager was present and took no action against the staff. The staff never lost a day of work until she threatened the Manager's friend, Priscilla. Priscilla's children's & grandchildren arrived at Linden Park Apartments with guns because this same staff threatened to do bodily harm to her as well. The manager terminated the staff person on the spot. The manager had her husband (James) escort the staff to her car because the two carloads of armed young people were out front.

Finally, I have followed protocol and at this point exhausted every level of the complaint process including reaching out to the Board of Directors for the Owner Company. In no instance has any response addressed the direct concerns and problems of abuse and neglect experienced by older adults or living conditions at Linden Park Apartments. As noted by the January 23, 2023, letter from MAC Board VP, Pastor Greg Maggiano. In his response, he suggests third party mediation to resolve what he describes as conflict between myself and management. Although, it might halt personal eviction as he implies, it does nothing to provide an independent and thorough investigation into the operation and management, and overall public health and safety concerns of older adult residents at Linden Park.

### **Root Cause: Management - Internal Conflict – Staff and Residents**

At Linden Park Apartments in particular, Manager Colleen Palmer is the cause of 99% of the problems. Another pressing issue at Linden Park Apartments is the constant employee turnover and management instigation of conflict between staff and the residents. According to staff who have resigned, Mrs. Palmer on several occasions stated derogatory comments about the residents. For example, one staff shared with me that Mrs. Palmer tells everyone who comes to make inquiries about the treatment of residents, "Oh she (me) is the troublemaker, and they are stupid, old and crazy. Don't believe anything that they tell you." As a result, they leave without completing any independent investigation.

It appears that Somerset Development, MAC and Habitat for America sanctions an environment that wholeheartedly supports manager Palmer and her immediate supervisor at Habitat for America, Vice-President, Sandy Kendall abusive behaviors which is causing us bodily and emotional harm.

Colleen Palmer is being protected while we are dying, abused, and ignored. We are pleading with the Federal Delegation, the Maryland State Delegation, and the City of Baltimore elected officials to stop this abuse by managers in all senior residential housing in Maryland. We deserve better as we live our final days. We may be old, but we aren't crazy. We know what abuse feels like. Two residents have been hit by speeding motorists and Linden Park Apartments hasn't taken any actions to assist us instead, I had four stop signs posted however we're still at risk of being run down by the traffic in front of our building, and our Councilman refused to assist us with any traffic control devices.

Somerset Development (partnership owner of Linden Park Apartments) owns the Baltimore Unity Hall and several other properties in Baltimore City. Likewise, the older adults residing in the Marlborough Senior Apartments, located around the corner on Eutaw Street, asked to be a party to these complaints because they are experiencing similar issues with management staff.

### **Call for Policy Change:**

Abusive behavior by the managers, contributes to the increased isolation, depression, and of homelessness of older adults. We need city, state, and federal oversight! Today's older adults require additional resources to improve their quality of life. Like our millennials, older adult needs are more complex than ever before. As a result, a policy change is warranted, and should be promulgated as a requirement for all managers of senior residential housings. Such policy should include these minimum requirements: (1) Managers must be licensed clinical social workers to effectively address the needs of the older adult aging population. (2) Rotate managers every five years. (3) Family members cannot work at locations where they are supervised by another family member employed by the same company. (4) Repeal the RAD 30 years Contractual Agreements to all developers because the residents who were living in these buildings didn't receive due process. (5) Private interviews with residents need to take place to halt the abuse to older adults who resides in senior residential housings in Maryland. In Baltimore, the J. Van Story Branch Senior Housings is the worst of the worst.

Safety, health status and the lack of efficient infrastructure are serious concerns for older adults residing in senior residential housings. There needs to be armed security guard in every senior residential housing. In the RAD buildings in Baltimore, the plumbing is faulty, the elevators often are not operating, and the trash chutes are environmentally inadequate and in poor condition, creating respiratory conditions and falls risks. Aging in place research shows case management services and service coordination are necessary to provide success and well-being. Residents are being traumatized by the managers, drug dealers, and violation of the core standard that these buildings are required to function under in order to receive federal, state and city funding.

In Service

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