

The Baltimore City Department of  
**HOUSING & COMMUNITY  
DEVELOPMENT**

## MEMORANDUM

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

From: Michael Braverman, Housing Commissioner *MB*

Date: November 21, 2018

Re: **City Council Bill 18-0107R, Investigative Hearing – Arson and Fire Fatality Awareness:  
Community Risk Reduction Program**

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The Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) has reviewed City Council Bill 18-0107R, for the purpose of calling on representatives from several City agencies to discuss arsons, fire fatalities and injuries, and school fires; and to discuss what steps the City can take to reduce the risk of these incidents occurring to protect the children and residents of Baltimore City.

HCD takes several measures to improve fire safety throughout Baltimore City.

- The Office of Permits and Plans Review insures that new construction and rehabilitation work is properly planned out to meet all building, fire and related safety codes and that the proper reviews are conducted by the Baltimore City Fire Department prior to any permits being issued. The reviews include compliance with safety requirements such as, sprinklers, smoke detectors, fire alarms, clear exit paths, proper signage and the use of proper fire retardant materials.
- The construction inspection team performs inspections of all permitted work relating to building construction to insure the work complies with the applicable codes, including all electrical standards.
- The housing inspection team conducts interior inspections of property, at the request of tenants, for possible code enforcement violations and issues emergency notices, as appropriate, which require the violations to be corrected within a certain timeframe. Depending on the type of violations that are identified, especially those related to fire or health, could result in the property being vacated until the violations are corrected. The housing inspection team also gets referrals from other City agencies, such as the Police and Health Departments, to investigate potential fire and health code enforcement issues that are brought to their attention.
- The new Rental Inspection Program, which adds inspection and rental licensing requirements for all non-owner occupied single-family rental dwellings by January 1, 2019 should result in a

reduced risk of fire or fire related deaths due to electrical issues or lack of smoke detectors. The inspection checklist includes the following five fire-related items:

1. Electrical live wires are not visible in living areas.
2. Electrical outlets are protected by cover plates.
3. Electrical outlets in areas where water is generally present (e.g. kitchen, bathroom) are Ground Fault Interrupter (GFI) protected.
4. Lighting fixtures are functional and switches protected by cover plates.
5. Smoke detectors are properly installed and operational.

All multi-family dwellings will continue to be inspected and the current checklist includes the following six fire-related items:

1. Fire separation is intact between dwellings, hallways, and stairways.
  2. Fire alarm system is in working order.
  3. Fire doors are present, free of defect and closures work.
  4. Exit signs are installed and clearly visible.
  5. Mechanical room (furnace, boiler) has proper clearance and is not used for storage.
  6. Electrical room (meters, wires) has proper clearance.
- The local Building, Fire, and Related Codes are updated every three years. This an opportunity for the City to keep current with International and State Codes and provide adjustments to meet local conditions. In this fashion, the City maintains industry-best standards with respect to fire safety. The State is expected to approve newly updated codes in ensuing months triggering a requirement that localities update Codes within the following six months. As such, HCD has started meeting with relevant agencies in anticipation of updating local Codes which would be presented to Council in 2019.

MB:sd

cc: Mr. Kyron Banks, *Mayor's Office of Government Relations*