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# CITY OF BALTIMORE

Brandon M. Scott – Mayor  
Zeke Cohen – Council President



## Office of Council Services

Nancy Mead – Director  
100 Holliday Street, Room 415  
Baltimore, MD 21202

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# COMMITTEE ON LEGISLATIVE INVESTIGATIONS

**The Honorable Isaac "Yitz" Schleifer**  
**CHAIR**

## HEARING NOTES

*LO25-0041*

*Legislative Oversight – Strengthening Renter Safety Act*

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**Hearing Date:** 2/5/2026

**Hearing Start Time:** 4:00 PM

**Hearing End Time:** 6:30 PM

**Location:** Du Burns Council Chamber / Webex

**Total Estimated Attendance:** 50

**Committee Members in Attendance:**

- Chair Isaac "Yitz" Schleifer
- Sharon Green Middleton

**Additional Councilmembers in Attendance**

- Council President Zeke Cohen
- Odette Ramos
- Zac Blanchard
- Jermaine Jones

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## MAJOR SPEAKERS

*(This is NOT an attendance record.)*

- Alice Kennedy – Commissioner, Department of Housing and Community Development
- Jason Hessler – Deputy Commissioner, Department of Housing and Community Development

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## NOTES

- Chair Schleifer began the hearing thanking those in attendance
- Council President Cohen delivered some opening remarks
  - Thanked agency representatives and others in attendance
  - We have a responsibility to protect our most vulnerable residents
  - A few years ago we toured housing developments around Baltimore
    - Many were well maintained
    - Many others were not and their owners suffered no consequences
  - We saw one facility with a broken elevator and bedbug infestation
  - We passed the strengthening renter safety act which was implemented one month ago
  - The act requires DHCD to develop a priority dwelling unit list for units with repeat violations

- Those properties then become a priority for enforcement actions
  - Building owners are required to attend meetings with DHCD
  - Landlords who make needed repairs will have no issues, those who do not could lose their license
  - This law does not prevent good, responsible landowners
  - This law only targets the worst of the worst
- Richard Grant – Resident
  - The Act and related initiatives are very important to the renters in Baltimore
  - Landlords do not respond well to tenants' complaints
  - Has lived in Wayland Village for 15 years
  - Apartment building has been without HVAC for years
    - In the winter, you live in a freezer
    - In the summer, you live in an oven
  - Initially, landlords provided space heaters but these heaters do not heat the entire apartment and are not safe
  - Efforts to involve code enforcement via 311 resulted in residents being informed that the system could not be fixed
  - Tenants are concerned that complaints will result in them losing their home
  - Obtaining the help of legal aid has been critical but the landlord has still failed to update the HVAC system
- Caroline Tripp – Maryland Legal Aid
  - Favors the Act but is concerned about implementation
  - DHCD has demonstrated it is unable to accomplish what it is already required under the law
    - Properties have been approved with subpar filings
- Lawrence Horton – Resident
  - Longtime resident of Sharp Leadenhall
  - Have lost security in recent years
  - In 2024 formed tenant council to address deteriorating conditions
    - Since then the council has filed claims and escrow cases
    - Tenants dealt with mold and mildew, failure to remove trash
  - Met with management company before claims and cases
    - The company took a long time to even recognize the group
    - Only once the media was involved
    - Rats and rodents in the building
    - No attempt to fix even though management knew that councilmembers were coming
  - Unsure of how management was getting money from HUD despite not having a license
  - Conditions have only gotten worse over the past 4 years
  - People are scared to leave the conditions or complain for fear of retribution
  - Quality of life has dropped for the residents in the complex
- DHCD
  - Discussed criteria for priority dwellings – see synopsis in bill file
  - DHCD has conducted outreach with property owners who have 20 or more related violations
  - Update CoDeMap with priority dwelling locations
  - Created notification for properties that do not have a rental license

- First round of priority inspections will occur February-May, second round June-October
  - Resident of high violation priority dwellings can request unit inspections
  - Prior to an inspection, a landlord must give notice to all tenants
  - Enforcement
    - DHCD has been working with Environmental Control Board and BCIT to update existing violation list to include new citations based on what DHCD inspectors encounter
  - Public can report instances where landlords are operating without a rental license
  - Public should call 311 to report
- Public Testimony
  - Senior residents frequently encounter broken elevators and residents are often retaliated against by managers
  - Should consider expanding these programs to single-family homes
  - Repairs take an unnecessarily long time to be addressed
  - Residents are frustrated with absentee landlords
- Questions
  - CM Blanchard
    - Thanks the residents have the courage to come out and speak on record
    - This is about respecting people's rights
    - We have to do better
    - Is DHCD confident that the list we were provided with includes every building that meets the criteria
      - Yes
    - How many of the buildings were added to the list because of 311 calls
      - Only one of those listed
    - What does this suggest about the use of 311 calls as qualifying criteria
      - We struggle with getting tenants to call 311
  - Council President
    - Appreciates residents coming out to share their stories
    - Baltimoreans are resilient AND paying rent
    - We must be clear that residents who are being exploited are contributing to our city and deserve great representation
    - We must be serious about enforcement
    - What will we see changed, what should residents expect from DHCD based on this law
      - Identified properties will be having meetings to review the open violations
      - Property owners are required to attend
      - Property managers should have a clear understanding of rules and responsibilities
    - It is ridiculous that residents cannot make any contact with a local manager
    - Do we have the right criteria to identify problematic properties
      - We need time to find out – it is a good start
      - Some property owners are not clear what property managers are doing
  - CM Jones
    - Thanks residents for their testimony

- Often residents hear that owners do not have the funds to make necessary repairs
- What is the solution when owners say they don't have the money? How many of the identified properties is that the case?
  - DHCD
    - We don't know until we have conversations with owners
    - There are some grants for repair of units
    - Some property owners may say that to say it
  - There are organizations that will take ownership to another organization
    - That is supported by DHCD
- VP Middleton
  - Thanks Council President for introducing the bill
  - Tonight's testimony was deep and sincere
  - Funding needs to be replenished for the Security Deposit Relief Act
  - Informed that the identified residence on Palmer Ave has not had water for 3 days
  - There must be some dysfunction between agencies
  - What is done by DHCD for emergencies like water and others
    - Have assisted provide emergency shelter for impacted residents
      - Ultimately residents must pay
    - from an inspection standpoint, mechanical equipment must perform its intended function
      - will place notices in instances of failure
  - These are frequently problems faced by older adults
- CM Ramos
  - Will hold a hearing in two weeks on 25-0141
    - Would expand to all properties and create rental property receivership
  - On the current number of inspectors – the housing inspectors are the same as code enforcement inspectors
    - Yes
  - You previously mentioned your ideal number was in the 60s to 80s
    - Unrealistically 120
  - On the current list – the data for the Hanover Square apartments shows no open violations but it is listed as a high violation priority dwelling unit
    - 73 interior building code 311 reports in 2025 – this seems low
    - Did discuss with local member that this building had low 311 calls but have worked to increase the reports
    - There may be open notices today but it did not have any in 2025
  - 311 calls need to be translated into inspections to get open notices
  - Please provide criteria that got them on the priority dwelling list
  - People are afraid of retaliation, will there be marketing around the anonymous report mechanism
    - Will work with MOGR

- Chair Schleifer
- 35 out of 38 are on it for violations, do those in dispute still appear on the list
  - Yes, they could

***FURTHER STUDY REQUESTED***

Request	From	Agency
Clarification on total number of housing inspectors desired by DHCD to accommodate code and PUD inspections	Ramos	DHCD

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**Hearing Packet in bill file?** -----  YES  NO  N/A  
**Attendance Sheet in bill file?** -----  YES  NO  N/A  
**Vote Record in bill file?** -----  YES  NO  N/A  
**Agency reports read?** -----  YES  NO  N/A  
**Hearing televised or audio-digitally recorded?** -----  YES  NO  N/A  
**Certification of advertising/posting notices in the bill file?** -----  YES  NO  N/A  
**Evidence of notification to property owners in bill file?** -----  YES  NO  N/A

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Notes by: Ethan Navarre  
Notes Date: 2/5/2026

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