
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

COMMITTEE ON LEGISLATIVE INVESTIGATIONS

The Honorable Isaac "Yitzy" Schleifer
CHAIR

HEARING NOTES

LO25-0041

Legislative Oversight – Strengthening Renter Safety Act

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 "Yitzy" Schleifer
- Sharon Green Middleton

Additional Councilmembers in Attendance

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

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

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 disfunction 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

Hearing Packet in bill file? -----	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A
Attendance Sheet in bill file? -----	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A
Vote Record in bill file? -----	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A
Agency reports read? -----	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A
Hearing televised or audio-digitally recorded? -----	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A
Certification of advertising/posting notices in the bill file? -----	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A
Evidence of notification to property owners in bill file? -----	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A

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

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