

**FYE 2022 Budget for Baltimore City  
Taxpayer Night Testimony  
5/27/2021**

I am Dr Terry Fitzgerald. I am a resident of Mount Washington in City Council District 5. I have been practicing medicine in Baltimore for 36 years and I am a officer of Chesapeake Physicians for Social Responsibility. I comment here on multiple issues related to housing, but I ask you to give special attention to the following two paragraphs and the last two paragraphs of this testimony.

I wish to emphasize that HOUSING IS HEALTH. There are excessive funds pouring into the police department, funds that ARE NOT creating a safer and more secure environment. Supposedly that has been recognized, and some money was removed from the police budget last year. Nonetheless, this new proposed budget provides \$27 million more to the police than the last budget as amended. **I support the call to remove 25% of the proposed budget for police and dedicate that money to activities that truly support the community and actually create public safety.**

GOOD HOUSING is critical for GOOD HEALTH. As a physician I have seen that every day. Over the years city officials have given lip service to this fact, but it has never truly been taken seriously. The health of our city and the health of its citizens demand a commitment to and a focus on dealing with the problems of housing in Baltimore City.

Poor housing conditions are associated with respiratory infections, asthma, injuries, lead poisoning, and mental health problems.<sup>1</sup> Asthma is a particularly serious example of how poor housing can threaten lives. "Poor housing, often the result of poverty and lack of social resources, is the real elephant in the chronic asthma room" wrote the authors of an article entitled "Home Visits are needed to Address Asthma Health Disparities in Adults"<sup>2</sup>

Children hospitalized for asthma who were from a census tract with high density for housing code violations were more likely to be return to the ER or be re-hospitalized than children in neighborhoods with lower density of housing code violations.<sup>3</sup> This was a study out of Cincinnati.

The worst asthma hot spot in Baltimore is in zip code 21223, "where decrepit houses, rodents and bugs trigger the disease" and visits to the hospital at a rate 4 x that of residences in wealthier neighborhoods in Baltimore.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1447157/>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.acionline.org/article/S0091-6749\(16\)31218-0/pdf](https://www.acionline.org/article/S0091-6749(16)31218-0/pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4458371/>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/hospitals-find-asthma-hot-spots-more-profitable-to-neglect-than-fix/2017/12/01/0d804ce2-b806-11e7-be94-fabb0f1e9ffb\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.e5696d4197c4](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/hospitals-find-asthma-hot-spots-more-profitable-to-neglect-than-fix/2017/12/01/0d804ce2-b806-11e7-be94-fabb0f1e9ffb_story.html?utm_term=.e5696d4197c4)

Young children exposed to overcrowding and/or multiple moves in one year, often associated with food insecurity as well as housing insecurity, were more often felt by their caregivers to have poor health, impaired educational, social or emotional skills, and to be measured to have low weight compared to other children.<sup>5</sup>

In older children and adolescents, a history of multiple moves has been associated with mental health problems, substance abuse, increased behavior problems, poor school performance, and increased risk of teen pregnancy. These negative outcomes will likely handicap them in their adult lives.

Homelessness is the extreme of housing insecurity and homeless people have a shocking loss of average life expectancy from 78 years in the general population to 42-52 Years among the homeless.<sup>6</sup>

Housing insecurity, therefore, makes people sick, leads to expensive and ineffective overutilization of expensive emergency room and hospital care and certainly with homelessness, leads to a tragic shortening of life.

A recent article in JAMA described housing as “health” and suggested that we should consider providing housing as equivalent to giving a vaccine in regards to preventing illness and disability.<sup>7</sup>

It is not surprising that studies show that providing adequate housing to people who would otherwise be among the housing insecure, in addition to being the right thing to do, often saves money. A housing study in Massachusetts found that after providing housing for 766 homeless people, health costs went from “\$33,190 per year, including hospitalization, emergency room visits, drug detox, incarceration, to \$15,468 per year for housing and health care, because health care costs dropped so precipitously after housing was provided<sup>8</sup>.

In Baltimore there is a shortage of affordable low-cost housing and among large cities a high eviction rate exceeded only in Detroit.<sup>9</sup> 56% of renters are burdened by housing costs, paying over 30% of their income. Only four other cities have a higher percentage of rent burdened residents. A two-bedroom rental is basically out of reach for too many. State programs that give incentives to investors to build housing do nothing to provide more low-income housing and might even drive up housing costs.<sup>10</sup> All of this is a recipe for a housing insecurity and health crisis.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3134514/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.nationalhomeless.org/factsheets/health.html>

<sup>7</sup> <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2667710>

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.csh.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/SocialDeterminantsofHealth\\_2014.pdf](https://www.csh.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/SocialDeterminantsofHealth_2014.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> <http://abell.org/sites/default/files/files/cd-justicediverted216.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.citylab.com/equity/2016/05/in-baltimore-even-full-time-working-families-cant-afford-housing/482190/>

So the problems associated with housing in Baltimore City are immense, but I want to emphasize the problem of lead in our housing as a place to start and a place to use some of the excess funds that are now directed to “policing”. The BURDEN OF LEAD in our housing is a well recognized and well ignored topic. A Baltimore Sun investigative report on rent court published recently documented that families were allowed to rent even where inspectors found that there were lead hazards noted in the rental unit.<sup>11</sup> In 2013, The Abell Foundation report “Justice Diverted,” based on a survey of people brought before renter’s court, found that 41% noted flaking or peeling paint.”<sup>12</sup> Lead exposure is harmful at any level and children so exposed may experience life-long neurocognitive effects.

Seriously addressing the danger of lead paint and lead in pipes in older Baltimore houses requires very serious commitment and focus. We must face up to this problem, seriously evaluate it, and fight for the funds to address it. The effects of lead on cognition, behavior, and development are generally irreversible and, in fact, contribute to crime in our city. The costs to the individual and the costs to society are immeasurable. Yet we continue to ignore it. **I call on the city to lead the way by taking excess resources currently given to the police department and committing them to the study of the lead burden and how to address it.** This should be a major undertaking, not just a small “study”. This should involve experts in many fields from across the country and should draw in officials of other cities in the US. This work could create the momentum to act on a national scale. It is time to take this seriously and to spend money for **true public safety**.

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<sup>11</sup> <http://data.baltimoresun.com/news/dismissed/>

<sup>12</sup> <http://abell.org/sites/default/files/files/cd-justicediverted216.pdf>