

The Honorable President and Members of the Baltimore City Council
Room 409, City Hall
100 N. Holliday Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21202

Re: City Council Bill 23-0357 – Strengthening Renters’ Safety Act

SUMMARY

City Council Bill 23-0357 – Strengthening Renters’ Safety Act seeks to improve the living conditions and the safety of Baltimore renters through the implementation of a criteria for priority dwellings and inspections, updates to regulations pertaining to new rental dwelling license applications and renewals, and the establishment of the Rental Licensing and Inspection Task Force.

The Mayor’s Office of Homeless Services (MOHS) has reviewed Council Bill 23-0357 and determined that persons at risk of or experiencing homelessness can benefit from the proposed legislation. The Bill prohibits individuals from renting or offering to rent any part of a rental dwelling without a valid license provided by the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) Housing Commissioner. The Bill also prohibits any individuals from charging or collecting rent for a rental dwelling without being licensed at the time of the offer and when occupancy was provided. Once notified of individuals in violation of these requirements, DHCD will intervene and notify occupants by detailing the responsibilities of the owners and penalties associated with noncompliance.

Upon review, MOHS has determined we support the proposed regulations, however, we acknowledge that it presents both benefits and challenges for people at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

Those in crisis can be susceptible to housing and financial scams that can exacerbate strained situations specifically in preventing homelessness, but the licensing requirements outlined in this Bill would decrease the threat of a scam and protect those individuals. The challenge that these regulations present pertain to the City’s limited housing inventory, and potentially placing residents currently occupying unlicensed rental dwellings in jeopardy of losing their housing once property owners become licensed. Fees and other costs associated with obtaining and maintaining a license can act as deterrents for unlicensed individual and private property owners, and the Housing Commissioner may also deny, suspend, or revoke a property owner’s rental dwelling license which would then prohibit them from operating the rental dwelling altogether.