



MEMORANDUM

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

From: Alice Kennedy, Acting Housing Commissioner

Date: July 8, 2021

Re: City Council Resolution 21-0036R - Informational Hearing – Avoiding an Eviction Crisis

The Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) has reviewed City Council Resolution 21-0036R, for the purpose of calling for a multi-faceted and comprehensive hearing on the looming eviction crisis and what we can do to avoid it by: inviting the Executive Director of the Mayor's Office of Children and Family Success, the Acting Commissioner of the Baltimore City Department of Housing and Community Development, and the Executive Director of the Community Action Partnership, to report on the outcomes of the Eviction Prevention Program and what more can be done; inviting representatives from the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs and the Esperanza Center to discuss the challenges renters who are immigrants are facing and provide recommendations on additional protections; and inviting representatives from the Public Justice Center and the Fair Housing Action Center of Maryland to report on evictions thus far, outline the rights of tenants now and the rights granted by new laws passed in the General Assembly and the City Council, and make recommendations for additional protections

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, DHCD implemented a Temporary Rent Support (TRS) program to assist tenants experiencing COVID-19 hardship. Applications opened in July 2020. DHCD reviewed 6,001 applications and approved 686 tenants. There were a variety of reasons why some applicants were not able to be approved, such as incomplete applications, failure to provide missing documentation, lack of response from the tenant or landlord, and duplicate applications. DHCD worked closely with tenants and landlords to assist them with the application process. To prioritize tenants, DHCD focused on tenants with 80% or below the Area Median Income (AMI). The average assistance disbursed to tenants was \$2,486 to cover the Months of April, May, and June 2020.

From July 2020 onward, tenants were invited to apply to the Mayor's Office of Children and Family Success' (MOCFS) Eviction Prevention Program. DHCD assisted MOCFS in training to use the Neighborly software to process applications, to search dwelling licensing on DHCD's property registration page, and to use DHCD's mapping tool CoDeMap. Any applicants vetted during the TRS program were automatically approved for MOCFS' Eviction Prevention Program and DHCD shared documentation to expedite the process. DHCD and MOCFS continue to collaborate on facilitating the Eviction Prevention Program.

Brandon M. Scott, Mayor • **Alice Kennedy**, Acting Housing Commissioner

417 East Fayette Street • Baltimore, MD 21202 • 443-984-5757 • dhcd.baltimorecity.gov

In addition to TRS and the Eviction Prevention Program, the City Council passed the COVID-19 Renter Relief Act, which prohibits landlords from announcing rent increases during a declared state of emergency and within the 90-day period after the state of emergency is lifted. It also prohibits fees for late payment or no payment of rent, as well as all rent increases that are scheduled to take place during the state of emergency.

DHCD is in the process of implementing the Right to Counsel legislation, which went into effect April 1, 2021 and must be fully implemented by DHCD within four years. This legislation provides eligible tenants with access to counsel in eviction proceedings. It also requires DHCD to fund organizations to conduct outreach and education regarding tenants' rights. Currently, DHCD is working with legal assistance providers, a benefits coordinator, and community advocates to design the implementation of this program, as well as create an education and outreach plan. We are also working to develop a legal services delivery model, collaborating with Baltimore City legal providers who will provide counsel.

During our regular operations, DHCD assists tenants through our Homeownership and Housing Preservation (HHP) Division. HHP's LIGHT Intake & Assessment unit makes referrals for energy and water bill assistance, the State's renters tax credit, legal counsel, and weatherization and lead hazard reduction programs for renters. We provide tenants with information on a variety of City and State programs to alleviate renter hardship.

Lastly, in the past year, the Baltimore City Council and the Maryland General Assembly passed additional tenant protections. The General Assembly passed House Bill 18 which provides tenant access to counsel and Senate Bill 401 which requires landlords to provide additional notice for lease non-renewal. The Baltimore City Council and Mayor Scott's administration are actively working on standing up programs to provide direct security deposit assistance to tenants. DHCD is supportive of these efforts as it will lower the barrier for tenants to find affordable housing.

DHCD recommends the creation of an additional position within the agency to assist tenants facing eviction. Currently, much of our renter assistance is done ad-hoc by our Tax Sales Services Coordinator and the HHP division. A dedicated position to focus on tenant outreach, referral to existing programs, and liaison with organizations like Baltimore Renters United would be impactful in implementing legislation geared toward supporting tenants and avoiding an eviction crisis.

DHCD **supports** the passage of City Council Resolution 21-0036R.

AK:mn,sm

cc: Ms. Themelis, Nina, *Mayor's Office of Government Relations*