



Legislation Text

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INTRODUCTORY*

CITY OF BALTIMORE
COUNCIL BILL R
(Resolution)

Introduced by: Councilmember Stokes

A RESOLUTION ENTITLED

A COUNCIL RESOLUTION concerning
Investigative Hearing - Public Housing Residents - Sexual Abuse Allegations
FOR the purpose of calling on the Housing Commissioner, and other Housing Authority of Baltimore City officials, to appear before the City Council to address the reprehensible allegations of sexual abuse of public housing residents at the hands of HABC employees, and to explain Housing's response, or lack thereof, to these allegations once they were made aware of them.

Recitals

Extremely serious allegations of sexual assault and harassment have been raised against employees in at least 3 City-operated public housing facilities. According to the allegations, multiple workers in the Gilmor Homes, Westport, and Govans Manor public housing complexes have demanded sexual favors from vulnerable female residents as the price for performing essential repairs needed to make their homes habitable. Reportedly, some victims suffered this abuse for 2 or more years.

Private lawsuits and criminal investigations are currently seeking justice for the victims. As Mayor Rawlings-Blake has said, ♦If the allegations are true, they♦re despicable and unacceptable...there is no excuse for that type of behavior♦.

While these criminal and civil actions advance to try to put things right for the victims and punish the individuals involved in perpetrating these despicable acts, it is important that the City simultaneously address the failures in oversight and accountability that could have allowed these actions to occur in the first place. As reprehensible as the alleged conduct by any one individual even once would be, it is equally, if not more, troubling that the abuse appears to have been widespread and sustained. This isn♦ a case of one isolated incident, but rather a systematic failure by the Housing Authority to protect the vulnerable residents of its facilities.

A Housing Authority spokesperson stated that the agency found the allegations extremely disturbing and considers any employee actions that would subject its residents to sexual abuse or sexual harassment to be reprehensible. But no evidence has surfaced indicating that Housing took meaningful steps to stop this behavior.

Instead, there are allegations that senior Housing officials were made aware of the abuse, and had opportunities to intervene, but failed to do so. According the Baltimore Sun The amended [civil] complaint also includes affidavits from the president of the maintenance workers union and his chief safety officer, who say the union called for the removal of the alleged abusers but housing officials ignored their requests.

Perhaps even worse, one victim, who allegedly worked directly for a senior Housing official, not only sought and was unable to receive help from her agency, but was reportedly told by an investigator that her safety could not be guaranteed if she tried to have her abuser dealt with internally.

These allegations that senior Housing officials at best turned a blind eye to widespread sexual abuse by their employees, or, at worst, were complicit in this abuse by putting victims who reported it into even more vulnerable positions demand answers. The Housing Commissioner, and other senior Housing Authority officials, must publically disclose what they knew about these alleged incidents, when they knew it, and what, if any, precautions were taken to ensure that they wouldn't reoccur. Only by taking full accountability for their roles in this unacceptable pattern of abuse can City leaders hope to take the difficult steps to regain the trust of public housing residents and make the changes necessary to prevent anything like this from ever happening again in our City.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF BALTIMORE, That the Council calls on the Housing Commissioner, and other Housing Authority of Baltimore City officials, to appear before it to address the reprehensible allegations of sexual abuse of public housing residents at the hands of HABC employees, and to explain Housing's response, or lack thereof, to these allegations once they were made aware of them.

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution be sent to the Mayor, the Housing Commissioner, and the Mayor's Legislative Liaison to the City Council.

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