

**City Council of Baltimore Bill 25-0141**  
**Rental Dwelling Health and Safety Enforcement Act**  
**Hearing before the Housing and Economic Development Committee**  
**May 12, 2026**

**Position: FAVORABLE**

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Chair Torrence and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Baltimore City Council Bill 25-0141, the Rental Dwelling Health and Safety Enforcement Act.

My name is Dr. Antoine Lovell. I reside in Maryland. I am a housing instability and eviction researcher. I serve as a member of the Research Council for the National Alliance to End Homelessness. I am also a former homeless youth. I wish to testify before you today about the empirical research regarding housing conditions, housing instability, enforcement systems, long-term public expenditure related to unsafe housing conditions, and the broader implications for the financial and social viability of Baltimore City as a result of this legislation.

Empirical studies demonstrate that substandard housing conditions result in a range of adverse effects at the individual, family, and community levels. For example, substandard housing conditions (i.e., mold exposure, rodent infestation, structural deterioration, lead exposure, poor ventilation, and/or lack of adequate heat) have been found to increase asthma, respiratory illness, and mental health issues; increase the risk of developing stress-related health issues; and negatively impact academic performance among children [1-3]. Moreover, housing instability increases the likelihood of homelessness, school mobility, economic uncertainty, and long-term neighborhood disinvestment [4-5].

Housing instability rarely exists in isolation. Rather, it is typically influenced by various factors, including substandard housing conditions, unaddressed maintenance needs, landlord neglect, and ineffective enforcement systems that contribute to involuntary removals and formal evictions [6]. By the time many families enter into eviction proceedings, they may have already experienced extended periods of deteriorating housing conditions and residential instability.

Among the key strengths of this legislation is that it shifts the emphasis from reactive enforcement toward a proactive housing governance framework. The body of research related to housing governance and code enforcement indicates that complaint-driven systems are insufficient to ensure safety since many tenants will not report hazards due to fear of retaliation, displacement, or loss of trust due to language barriers and concerns related to immigration status [7]. Therefore, some of the City's most vulnerable residents will continue to "fly under the radar" of enforcement systems.

Furthermore, several components of this legislation align with established best practices for housing stabilization. The extension of enforcement responsibilities beyond larger multi-unit buildings recognizes that substandard, unstable housing conditions frequently occur in smaller

units, which are subject to less regulation. Additionally, the requirement for increased audit frequency and disclosure of property ownership information addresses long-standing accountability concerns related to property owners who conceal their identities using shell companies and/or layered LLC arrangements.

Moreover, the prohibition against retaliatory action against a tenant based on a tenant's actual or perceived immigration status is crucial to both the health and stability of housing. Existing literature on complaint-driven enforcement systems shows that fearful tenants are less likely to report hazardous living conditions if they fear retaliation or immigration-related consequences. When tenants cannot safely report hazardous living conditions, unhealthy living environments persist longer, thereby increasing broad public health risks that extend well beyond individual households.

Additionally, the provision allowing for enhanced oversight of chronically distressed properties through regular inspections, audits, and/or complaint history patterns reflects preventive housing policy practice. Many researchers agree that earlier interventions tend to be less costly and more effective than waiting until properties require emergency interventions [8].

Similarly, the legislation's enhanced inspection oversight provisions are critical. Literature on regulatory compliance indicates that standards for accountability, transparency, compliance, enforcement, and inspection auditing can enhance regulatory compliance outcomes while providing greater institutional effectiveness [9].

Finally, the receivership provisions contained in this legislation are supported by existing research on housing stabilization. Researchers have consistently demonstrated that mechanisms that intervene early to stabilize distressed properties reduce displacement, retain housing quality, and avoid additional public expenditures associated with emergency shelter systems, healthcare utilization, and crisis response services [10].

However, there are also numerous cost-benefit dimensions to consider in terms of addressing unsafe housing conditions. The long-term societal costs associated with failing to address these issues include increased emergency healthcare utilization, shelter system costs, increased child welfare involvement, educational disruptions, workforce instability, and broadened public expenditures [11-12]. Conversely, preventive enforcement-based housing policies and stabilization policies are often substantially less expensive than responding once families enter into crisis systems.

In addition to the previously mentioned cost benefits, there are also numerous implications for Baltimore's long-term tax base and economic future. Areas experiencing chronic housing deterioration commonly experience declines in property values, reduced private investment, population loss, weakened commercial activity, and broader neighborhood decline. When residents flee neighborhoods due to unsafe and unstable housing conditions and neighborhood decay, cities incur losses in population, long-term tax revenue, workforce stability, and economic productivity. Safe, healthy housing conditions correlate strongly with neighborhood retention, local economic development, and the long-term fiscal sustainability of Baltimore City [14].

The legislative provisions also align with larger urban policy paradigms emphasizing the role of stable housing in promoting civic participation, neighborhood stability, and long-term urban vitality. A growing number of scholars argue that residents should be able to safely stay, live, and contribute to the communities they help sustain rather than fleeing those communities due to hazardous living conditions, instability, and neglect [15]. In addition, as a municipality, preventing neighborhood deterioration and retaining resident households is critically important to Baltimore's long-term economic competitiveness and social cohesion.

Lastly, research demonstrates that substandard housing conditions and weak enforcement systems disproportionately affect low-income communities of color due to historical structural disparities and the disinvestment in those communities. Thus, housing policy is not simply a matter of building code regulations and inspections, but also one of health equity, neighborhood stability, economic mobility, municipal sustainability, and the future trajectory of Baltimore communities.

Both as a scholar studying housing instability and as a formerly homeless youth, I believe this legislation provides an evidence-based approach for improving housing accountability across Baltimore City.

**For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on Baltimore City Council Bill 25-0141.**

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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