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MAYOR

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HB 1177

February 28, 2025

TO: Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee

FROM: Nina Themelis, Director of Mayor's Office of Government Relations

RE: House Bill 1177 - Landlord and Tenant - Tenant Repair and Maintenance
Complaint Hotline - Establishment

POSITION: Oppose

Chair Korman, Vice Chair Boyce and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) opposes House Bill (HB) 1177.

This Bill would require the Attorney General (AG) to establish a hotline for tenants to report complaints related to repairs and maintenance of residential real property. This bill would apply to privately owned property and property owned by the federal, state or a local government.

After reviewing the complaint, the AG can: refer the tenant to a legal services entity, report violations for local code enforcement, or bring an action in court to recover for injury or loss sustained by the tenant as a result of a violation of Title 8 {"Landlord and Tenant"} and seek equitable relief for the tenant. The bill would also require the AG's Office to file reports about the use of the system and any complaint patterns identified by the AG.

House Bill 1177 does not identify or limit the types of repair and maintenance issues that may be the subject of a complaint reported on the hotline. See, for example, Md. Code, Real Property, Section 8-211 {"Duty of landlords to repair or eliminate serious conditions and defects of residential dwelling units"} which does attempt to limit the types of conditions to which that section applies.

The bill appears to allow the AG's Office to sue the federal and state governments and Baltimore City if they are acting as a landlord and could create liability for the City. The bill contains no guidelines regarding the types of violations for which the AG's Office could bring suit. Generally, the bill contains few details as to how the AG would proceed with the complaint investigations and determine which, if any, of the possible remedies would apply.

Baltimore City currently utilizes a 311 Service System to provide a variety of services and accept complaints. 311 connects Baltimore citizens, businesses & visitors (including tenants) with a vast

array of city services, programs and information. Either by a live agent-assisted phone call or through the self-service web or mobile portal, 311 allows customers to report a problem, request a service, check the status of a previously submitted service request, and obtain information regarding City programs, events or services. This system is already set up to report complaints related to repairs and maintenance of residential real property.

When a complaint comes into the 311 system it is routed to the appropriate agency for investigation. DHCD's Housing Code Enforcement inspectors respond to a variety of issues including complaints related to repairs and maintenance. DHCD inspectors investigate the complaints, and as appropriate, issue citations or notices to the property owner to correct defects. DHCD Housing Code Enforcement inspectors typically respond to over 50,000 Service Requests (SRs) and complete over 200,000 inspections pre year.

This Bill is unnecessary as Baltimore City already provides an avenue for tenants, or anyone, to report complaints related to repairs and maintenance of residential real property. DHCD Housing Code Enforcement inspectors issue violation notices and citations for any violations observed. We also provide public access to all DHCD inspections, as well as a host of other property level data that might be useful to resolve a complaint via [CoDeMap](#).

This Bill overlooks the existing functionality of the 311 system used in Baltimore City, which already serves as a citizen services platform designed to facilitate interaction between residents and the city government. The 311 system effectively handles complaint reporting, service requests, information access, tracking, and direct communication with relevant agencies. Introducing multiple systems with overlapping functions could lead to inefficiencies and confusion, rather than improving service delivery.

While other jurisdictions may need this tool Baltimore City should be exempted as we already have an established process for reporting complaints and code enforcement. Most local jurisdictions have their own unique and distinct processes for receiving, tracking and resolving customer complaints. HB 1177 would impact Baltimore City DHCD by pulling staff time and resources away from providing critical services to address complaints emanating from the Attorney General's Office.

For these reasons, the BCA respectfully request an **unfavorable** report on HB 1177.