

## 2024 Housing and Community Development Forum

Please provide written answers to the following questions no later than March 4, 2024. The organizations facilitating the forum will then publish these answers on the web. Questions for the in-person forum will be taken in part from the written questions.

### 1. Addressing Vacants, Tax Sales, and Blight

This issue brief is extracted from [Anatomy of Baltimore's Blight](#) report, which examines how residents and communities prioritize and address property issues and what tools (policies, practices, funding, etc.) are needed to comprehensively execute their work toward blight remediation.

Baltimore calculates its vacant properties as those with Vacant Building Notices, which is about 16,700. However, we know there are many more vacant properties and vacant lots across the City. According to *Beyond Blight in Baltimore: Investing in Failed Housing Markets* (2020), there are more than 30,000 vacant properties (structures and lots) in Baltimore (Hillegass, 2020). These properties comprise about 10% of total properties in Baltimore. The City currently owns about 25% of these vacant properties. Many of these buildings are uninhabitable and thought to be either beyond repair or too costly to repair. In 2022, more than 50% of the locations where homicides occurred were near a property with a Vacant Building Notice, Tax Lien Certificate or vacant lot.

The Center for Problem-Oriented Policing noted that rats and other vermin infestations common to blighted properties are vectors for infectious diseases which threaten public health (Shane, 2016). Blight in Baltimore is called out in this report to illustrate another health risk correlation – higher rates of mosquito-borne illnesses resulting from water retained in the trash mounds that accumulate inside vacant properties. The debris in vacant properties and the vermin they attract contribute to conditions like asthma. Baltimore's asthma rates are more than double the national average. In the 21223 zip code, where vacancy is a problem, “paramedic crews make more asthma-related visits per capita ... than anywhere else in the City,” according to fire department records (Hancock, Bluth & Trielli, 2017).

Blight adversely impacts people's ability to maintain family and community bonds, often resulting in psychological trauma. When untreated, health and wellness diminish. Mindy Thompson Fullilove states, “Root shock, at the individual level, is the emotional trauma a person experiences when their environment is devastated. At the community level, root shock is the loss of interpersonal ties and the social, cultural, political, and emotional capital vested in the pooled connections. In short, root shock diminishes social, emotional, and financial resources” (2004).

Residents and communities all over Baltimore are working to stop and reverse the root shock caused by racist housing and community development policies. Many people working to prevent the harm caused recognize that depending on the same entities, policies and practices that created the problems to come up with solutions is unwise. Further, people who have lived experiences with pain will often produce the most equitable and sustainable solutions. The need for

reparative policies, practices and funding vehicles to address property issues, such as vacancy, illegal dumping and tax sales, among others, is clear. This [report](#) aims to meet that need by identifying and framing policies, practices, and funding streams enabling neighborhoods to direct and control housing and community development activities for truly equitable outcomes.

**Questions:**

- A. *What strategies would you take immediately to address widespread vacancy that especially impacts low-income Black and brown communities in Baltimore City?*
- B. *As Mayor or City Council President would you support legislation to create a land bank in Baltimore with neighborhood level decision-making authority?*
- C. *What will you do if elected to end the taking of homes and home equity that disproportionately impacts black homeowners and neighborhoods that result from tax lien sales?*
- D. *As Mayor or City Council President what will you do to hold speculators and slumlords accountable for damaging the condition of communities?*

## **2. Community Wealth Building**

Baltimore, like many post-industrial cities, suffers from significant unemployment, poverty and systemic discrimination that has resulted in extreme inequities between its neighborhoods. Despite the City's efforts to affect positive change, generational poverty persists and too many neighborhoods lack vibrant businesses, family-sustaining employment opportunities and quality, affordable housing.

Traditional economic development approaches have attempted to address these inequities, but have been insufficient in eradicating the root causes. In 2005, [The Democracy Collaborative \(TDC\)](#) coined the phrase “community wealth building” (CWB) to describe a range of alternative strategies that create inclusive, sustainable economies built on locally rooted and broadly held ownership. CWB is a community-focused model of economic development that places power and resources back into the hands of the communities and their residents.

For example, one key CWB model is the worker-owned cooperative, i.e., businesses that are owned and controlled by their employees, who share in the decision-making and the profits of the business (examples in Baltimore include [Taharka Brothers](#), [Baltimore Bicycle Works](#) and [Red Emma's](#), among others). In addition to offering people a chance to build assets, these businesses pay higher wages, empower workers and even have higher success rates than non-worker-owned businesses. Especially noteworthy in a city like Baltimore that has a high number of returning citizens, CWB models have a track record of creating good jobs for those excluded from traditional labor markets.

Recognizing the enormous potential of CWB models to help nurture a more equitable, inclusive, sustainable local economy, cities across the country are creating CWB offices and initiatives to help develop and grow models like worker-owned businesses, community land trusts (e.g., entities like Baltimore’s [North East Housing Initiative](#) (NEHI), [South Baltimore Community Land Trust](#), and [Charm City Land Trust](#)), community investment vehicles (e.g., [Invest York Road](#) and [Crowdfund Baltimore](#)), and CWB support organizations (e.g., [Baltimore Roundtable for Economic Democracy](#) (BRED) and [SHARE Baltimore](#)). For example, [Chicago](#) recently committed \$15 million to CWB strategies, models and ecosystem supports.

***Question:** Cities across the country are recognizing the value and importance of community wealth building models, which include worker-owned businesses and community land trusts, that anchor power and resources in disinvested communities to create more equitable, inclusive, vibrant neighborhoods. What will you do to help nurture and grow these models in Baltimore?*

### **3. With Us For Us (WUFU) Ballot Initiative - [www.wufubaltimore.com](http://www.wufubaltimore.com)**

[The With Us For Us \(WUFU\) Ballot Initiative calls for a Charter amendment that would effectively call for higher PILOT contributions from Baltimore City’s wealthy tax-exempt universities and hospitals through a transparent, community-led process.](#) If Baltimore successfully renegotiates the PILOT agreement, the City can use that money to create a community wealth building fund. A community wealth building fund is a pool of money that a government allocates to local organizations. Baltimoreans who run co-ops, community land trusts, community supported agriculture, and community investment vehicles and more, may be eligible for grants if such a fund is created. Grant finalists in Chicago’s community wealth building project have included daycares, community centers, green infrastructure groups, housing co-ops and more. A community wealth building fund will tangibly support Baltimore residents of color, allowing them to grow local businesses that support their communities and in many cases, employ other Baltimoreans.

PILOT (payment in lieu of taxes) refers to an arrangement between “anchor institutions” and municipalities (in this case, Baltimore City) to make an annual payment of an agreed-upon amount instead of paying property taxes. Fifteen hospitals and universities signed on to a PILOT agreement with the City in 2010. The agreement allows them to pay \$6 million in total—only 5% of the \$110 million they would otherwise owe. The PILOT agreement is up for renewal in 2026. Between now and then, the WUFU coalition will be mobilizing community members and telling our stories to show Baltimore’s elected officials that the PILOT agreements should be reconfigured in a transparent, community-led fashion to benefit our city, including its most vulnerable residents.

### **Questions:**

- A. *Anchor institutions, specifically hospitals and universities, have important roles in uplifting community conditions through multilevel strategies and economic investment. In Baltimore, 15 anchor institutions have signed a 10-year Payment In-Lieu of Taxes agreement that expires in 2026. What will you do to create a more transparent process for the next PILOT agreement and ensure institutions are paying their fair share to uplift Baltimore communities?*
- B. *Will you support the With Us For Us Ballot Initiative that would amend the City's Charter to facilitate anchor institutions paying their fair share and distributing those funds to community wealth building organizations?*

#### **4. Rent Stabilization**

In 2019, Baltimore ranked ninth in the nation for the greatest displacement of Black residents from their homes and communities. Since then, spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic, rent hikes and eviction rates have only worsened. However, as rents increase at rapid rates, wages of working class Baltimoreans have not kept up. Consequently, families are forced out of their homes and communities are forever ruptured. This can affect everyone from working parents, senior citizens relying on SSI to make ends meet, and the 31,300 children in Baltimore living in households struggling with overdue rent.

Rent stabilization is an essential tool to protect renters during this unprecedented time of displacement and instability. It sets a maximum percentage by which residential rent prices may increase each year. In doing so, it keeps communities together, families housed, and kids rooted in their community schools. As Baltimore strives to boost development and increase its housing stock, it is essential that we do so in a way that does not further drive displacement. We must ensure that we invest in the people who already make Baltimore what it is. Rent stabilization does just this, as it prioritizes the stability of existing communities of Baltimore City. It pairs well with other initiatives such as community land trusts and vacant housing rehabilitation that increase the housing stock available in the city.

Several jurisdictions throughout Maryland have passed rent stabilization ordinances, including Montgomery County just last year. However, Baltimore City must be a leader in establishing a rent stabilization policy that is strong enough to sufficiently protect renters from the tides of displacement. Montgomery County capped rent increases at 6% yearly, but this cap is too high. When comparing rents to local salary scales, such as that of Baltimore City school teachers, just one year of a 6% rent increase is enough to bring someone's rent to unaffordable levels. More than seventeen organizations throughout Baltimore, representing thousands of constituents, have endorsed a rent stabilization policy that would set a 2.5% yearly cap on rent increases. A 2.5% limit would make it possible for rents to keep pace with wages. At the same time, 2.5% is the average Consumer Price Index since 1995, so this limit ensures that landlords will not suffer losses from inflation. View the full [policy stance here](#).

**Question:** *Rising rent prices are making it unaffordable for Baltimore families to have stable housing. Counties like Prince George's and Montgomery have passed rent stabilization, and there is widespread, community-led support for a 2.5% yearly rent cap in Baltimore. Will you*

*champion a rent stabilization ordinance that allows yearly rent increases of no more than 2.5% in Baltimore City?*

## **5. Community Land Trusts**

Maryland Gov. Wes Moore recently declared 2024 to be “the year of housing,” echoing Baltimore researchers who identified homeownership barriers and vacant properties as two of the City’s biggest challenges. Baltimore is burdened by over [15,000 vacant properties](#), and their locations coincide with government agencies’ documented, historic pattern of race-based discrimination and disinvestment. Just [47% of Baltimore households own their homes](#); the majority of Baltimoreans do not benefit from the wealth creation and security that homeownership entails. A timely solution for Baltimore’s housing woes, community land trusts (CLTs) are well-positioned to combat both vacancy and barriers to homeownership.

CLTs are nonprofit housing developers with focuses on inclusive growth. They are marked by two features, permanent affordability and community stewardship. CLTs achieve permanent affordability by retaining ownership of the land they develop. After CLTs have constructed a home, they sell the home and lease the land to a low- or moderate-income buyer. The lease is coupled with subsidies and features income-based resale restrictions. In Baltimore, this ensures that the homeowner makes below market rate monthly mortgage payments set at \$700-800 and that the homeowner may only sell to another low- or moderate-income family.

CLTs achieve community stewardship with resident-led boards of directors, neighborhood organizing, and supportive services. The stewardship programming fosters deep relationships between the CLT and the homeowners such that when homeowners encounter problems like broken streetlights, local criminal activity or difficulties making their mortgage payments, they can rely on CLT staff to assist. Stewardship programming sets CLT homeowners up for long-term, stable tenures.

Due to the efforts of a grassroots, citywide mobilization of voters, the City established an Affordable Housing Trust Fund in 2018 in part to underwrite CLTs’ operating and capital costs. (Operating costs are the expenses associated with running a nonprofit; capital costs are those required to revitalize and construct housing.) For the past six years, CLTs have deployed the Trust Fund’s resources to build homes for families in Belair Edison, Barclay, East Baltimore and Curtis Bay. By rooting themselves in disinvested neighborhoods, rehabilitating abandoned properties and “buying down” affordability for low- and moderate-income buyers, CLTs are tackling vacancies and homeownership disparities head on. United under the banner of SHARE Baltimore, Baltimore’s CLTs aspire to create 1,500 affordable homeownership units by 2033. Consistent City support is required to scale CLTs in Baltimore and thus achieve inclusive growth.

**Question:** *The first spending plan for the Affordable Housing Trust Fund called for allocating over 38% of the Fund to community land trusts. This was the most significant dedicated funding allocation for CLTs in the country from a similar type of trust fund at the time. In practice, that has since been diminished to 30%. Would you work to restore Baltimore's original, historic allocation of funds to 38% of the Trust Fund? Will you uphold the written agreement between the organizers and the City to dedicate at least \$7 million/year in General Obligation Bonds to the Trust Fund?*

## 6. City Budget & Housing Brief

The City's speculative real estate market continues to generate record-setting revenue for the City (property taxes up \$29 million; transfer and recordation taxes up 7.6%). Yet, instead of investing additional funds in safe, fair, affordable rental housing to assist the [disproportionately Black population at risk of eviction](#), the City's FY 2024 budget gave away \$39 million in tax subsidies to developers of market-rate rental housing [located primarily in the white L](#), with rents out of reach for the majority of Black residents. The [recently-passed inclusionary housing law](#) will provide more access to these developments for working-class families, yet the majority of low and middle-income families in Baltimore need much more support to obtain and keep safe, affordable housing. Rent inflation increased dramatically during the pandemic, up 19% from 2020 through 2022, and evictions continue to rise in Baltimore as emergency rental assistance for eviction prevention is largely depleted.

We must radically reimagine the budget to allocate revenue to meeting basic human needs around housing, jobs and public health. In order to shape a budget that reflects our values of safe, affordable housing for all, City residents and housing advocates have prioritized the following:

- **Eviction Prevention Funds:** Evictions in Baltimore City are rapidly increasing and surpassing pre-COVID numbers in some months, yet the City's emergency rental assistance funds to prevent evictions have almost run out. It is our understanding that \$3 million in additional funding has been allocated for eviction prevention, but there has been no public announcement of when and how that money will be spent. According to [recent analysis by Stout Risius Ross and the Maryland Eviction Prevention Funds Alliance](#), *an allocation of \$15 million would assist nearly 5,620 Baltimore City families to avoid eviction and likely homelessness.* A financial setback such as a job loss, the unexpected death of a primary earner, or lost wages due to a serious medical issue should not have to result in a catastrophic eviction and homelessness.
- **Right to Counsel Funding:** Baltimore City passed a Right to Counsel in Evictions law (Art. 13 Sec. 6A), which requires full implementation for all covered individuals to obtain legal representation in eviction and rent escrow cases by April 1, 2025. \$1.6

million was dedicated to Right to Counsel in FY24, but \$1 million of that budget derives from one-time federal emergency funding. Meeting the implementation deadline and ensuring low-income tenants have access to counsel will require an increased, ongoing commitment to dedicate sufficient funding in future years.

- **Agency Funding:** In order to carry out their functions and serve Baltimore City tenants, agencies such as the Department of Housing and Community Development must be sufficiently funded. For example, City housing safety inspectors face more serious risks than those in neighboring jurisdictions in Maryland, yet are paid below-market rates. Despite the difficulty in hiring and retaining inspectors, the City cut the budget for housing safety inspectors for FY24. We must ensure agencies have the funds necessary to carry out their critical role in ensuring public health and safety and holding landlords accountable for their failures to address severe conditions of disrepair.

**Question:** *Will you ensure that eviction prevention funds, right to counsel for tenants and DHCD agency funding are prioritized and sufficiently funded in FY25 and subsequent years? How would you do so and at what levels?*

## **7. Landlord Licensing Reform**

In 2018, Baltimore City passed a critical public health and safety measure in requiring that virtually all Baltimore City landlords pass a periodic health and safety inspection and maintain an active license. While DHCD has made progress in implementing the law, significant issues remain. First, the law has a key structural flaw: It allows the landlord to choose and pay for their own private inspector – who then has an incentive to allow the landlord to pass an inspection in order to obtain additional fees for additional “inspections.” This is the fox guarding the hen house. Renters and advocates routinely report that landlords obtain fraudulent inspections due to this structural flaw in the law. Second, DHCD needs the resources and accountability structure to refrain from issuing rental licenses to landlords based on outdated inspection reports, without a complete inspection report being uploaded at all, and when there is an active housing code violation on file. Landlords are exploiting an under-resourced agency who lacks sufficient investment and infrastructure to provide a formal complaint process by which tenants may raise these issues or have an investigation into the fraudulent license. DHCD also lacks the investment and infrastructure to use its existing powers to audit licensing inspections and hold landlords accountable to ensure that landlords are in compliance. These issues counteract the efficacy of the licensing system, allow predatory landlords to thrive, and lead tenants to live in conditions of disrepair with fewer options to assert their rights.

**Question:** *Will you champion legislative reform of Baltimore City's landlord licensing law to address structural deficiencies and invest in accountable structures at DHCD to address the administrative barriers to implementation? How?*

## **8. Fair Housing**

In a Jan. 19, 2023, opinion piece, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Secretary Marcia L. Fudge outlined one of Dr. King's legacies: the passage of the Fair Housing Act. She noted how Dr. King, through the Chicago Freedom Movement, addressed and confronted racism and segregation, which had led to blacks living in "sub-standard homes and slums and seemingly never-ending cycles of poverty."

In 1910, Baltimore Mayor J. Barry Mahool adopted the first residential segregation ordinance in the country and signed what would be the nation's first segregation law on May 15, 1911. The law created de jure segregation, restricting Blacks to specific blocks of the City. By 1917, the Supreme Court found the law unconstitutional. Between 1917 and 1925, 18 neighborhood associations were formed, creating the Allied Civic and Protective Association, which pushed and created restrictive covenants throughout the City. These racist policies, coupled with federal state and local laws, further encouraged de jure segregation and have caused the de facto segregation we see and continue to try to dismantle here in Baltimore.

**Where and how Baltimoreans live truly impacts all aspects of a person's life.** Numerous books, such as [\*Not in My Neighborhood\*](#), [\*The Color of Law\*](#), and [\*The Black Butterfly\*](#), have been published detailing the state of Black and marginalized Baltimore. Several articles and reports ([\*Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice 2020\*](#), [\*COVID-19 and Homeownership in Baltimore\*](#), [\*January 10 CHAP Hearing - History of Inequity in Baltimore\*](#)) and studies (i.e, [\*Mt. Washington Pediatrics Community Needs Assessment 2021\*](#), Baltimore City Department of Health's Community Needs Assessment, 2017 <https://health.baltimorecity.gov/sites/default/files/health/attachments/Baltimore%20City%20CHA%20-%20Final%209.20.17.pdf>) have addressed the history and the current inequities and fair housing issues associated with Baltimore. The City has also faced several lawsuits addressing infractions of fair housing & ADA laws including [\*Thompson vs. HUD\*](#) and the [\*Bailey Consent Decree\*](#). Housing has also been deemed a social determinant of health. It has been over a century, and we are still dealing with our deplorable past, but there is hope!

With the closing of Baltimore Neighborhoods Inc. in 2016, additional resources are desperately needed for private fair housing enforcement. Government agencies, such as HUD, Maryland Commission on Civil Rights, Baltimore City's Office of Equity and Civil Rights, and groups such as Disability Rights Maryland, Public Justice Center, Flight Blight Bmore, Equal Rights Center, National Fair Housing Alliance, Economic Action Maryland and the Baltimore



Metropolitan Council have been actively involved with helping with different aspects of fair housing discrimination in Baltimore City, but there is a need for more.

The [Fair Housing Act \(as amended\) \(Title VIII of the 1968 Civil Rights Act\)](#) prohibits discrimination based on seven protected classes: race, color, national origin, religion, sex, familial status and disability. The law covers most Housing and has few exemptions. Based on the seven protected classes, the Act covers several prohibited practices in the rental and sale of Housing and mortgage lending. Additionally, the Fair Housing Act gives individuals with disabilities additional protections, which include the right to reasonable accommodations and modifications. The [State of Maryland](#) covers the federally protected classes plus source of income, gender identity, and marital status. [Baltimore City](#) protected classes include age (18+) and ancestry. Fair Housing also includes disparate impact and treatment. Redlining remains prohibited. For agencies receiving federal dollars, directly and indirectly from HUD, there are requirements by the City annually to affirmatively further fair housing, where jurisdictions, such as Baltimore, are required to remove barriers to fair housing choice. Other relevant laws include the [Violence Against Women Act \(VAWA\)](#), which provides protections against individuals who are survivors of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking, regardless of sex, sexual orientation or gender identity. Baltimoreans continue to face various forms of housing discrimination. The City is in need of a private, full-service fair housing agency with funding to champion fair housing enforcement, conduct fair housing testing, investigate fair housing violations, and provide fair housing education & outreach.

Currently, there is no specific Fair Housing complaint data publicly available for Baltimore City. According to the [2023 Fair Housing Trends Report](#) by the National Fair Housing Alliance, Maryland received 353 fair housing discrimination complaints. Between HUD and the Fair Housing Assistance Program (Maryland Commission on Civil Rights (MCCR)), Maryland received 116 disability housing complaints, 73 race housing complaints, and 106 other housing complaints. Economic Action MD reported 334 fair housing inquiries in 2022.

Baltimore City recently passed an inclusionary housing ordinance that will require developers to include affordable housing in new developments that receive a city tax break or zoning change. This innovative law is expected to produce over 900 new affordable, integrated affordable units in the next 10 years. However, much more needs to be done to meet the urgent need of tens of thousands of residents for affordable, fair, habitable housing.

Groups active in [fair housing advocacy](#) have made the following recommendations in different venues:

1. Require annual Fair Housing education for all housing employees, officials, and contractors.

2. Conduct a comprehensive audit/review of housing policies and procedures to ensure the City's policies and practices affirmatively further fair housing, committing to removing barriers to fair housing choice.
3. Invest in internal infrastructure to automate systems and ensure individuals on the waiting list have improved access to affordable housing programming (i.e., LIHTC, HCV, Inclusionary Housing, and other affordable housing programs).
4. To see investment in fair housing data, enforcement activities, and fair housing/tenant rights education and outreach for the general public.
5. To increase transparency in the housing programs.
6. Improve access to accommodations for individuals with Limited English proficiency and individuals with disabilities.
7. Support the development of the Inclusionary Housing program and other affordable housing programs in Baltimore City, which promote equity and address exclusionary housing practices.
8. Increase and invest in home ownership and repair opportunities for marginalized legacy residents.

## Questions

- A. *What will you do to end ongoing fair housing violations in the City?*
- B. *What long term strategies will you implement to ensure the City meets its obligations to remove impediments to fair housing choice and to affirmatively further fair housing for federal, state and local protected classes across all its housing-related programming and services?*
- C. *What types of programming/services will you put in place to address the long-term disinvestment with black and other marginalized communities within Baltimore City?*

## 9. Housing for Individuals with Disabilities

According to the [2022 American Community Survey \(ACS\)](#), 16.4% of Baltimore City's residents have a disability. A [majority](#) of those individuals have ambulatory, independent living or cognitive disabilities. Additionally, 14.8% of Baltimore City's population is 65 years and older. The ACS states the median gross rent is \$1,235. A majority of the City's residents are renters. More than 50% of the renters spend at least \$1,000 on rent each month (68.9%). The homeownership rate in Baltimore City is 47.8%.

According to the [Technical Assistance Collaborative \(TAC\) 2024 Priced Out Report](#), "There is no United States Housing market in which a person living solely on Supplemental Security Income (SSI) can afford a safe, decent apartment without rental assistance. Lacking access to affordable housing, many people with disabilities are forced into costly and segregated nursing facilities or state hospitals, homelessness or incarceration." Nationally, supplemental security

income (SSI) is only \$983. The average rent for a basic one-bedroom apartment is \$1,398 per month, "or 142% of a disabled person's income," leaving no money for food, transportation, clothing or other necessities.

The federal and state governments have rental and homeownership programs for people with disabilities. Those funds support senior housing and project-based vouchers for marginalized people and people with disabilities. The state also has the HomeAbility program which allows people with disabilities or caregivers to purchase a home.

[Nationwide](#) people with disabilities face housing insecurity. They experience poverty at twice the rate of nearly half of adults ages 25-61. It disproportionately impacts women and persons of color. Many individuals with disabilities face lower pay, food insecurity and more outstanding medical debt. They face challenges paying rent from month to month. Hospitalization, institutionalization and congregate living (nursing homes and other long-term care facilities) have a disproportionate number of fatalities occurring. These challenges place them at significant risk nationwide. Here in Maryland and throughout the nation, individuals with disabilities are the most discriminated against in terms of housing. Nationally and locally, there is also a lack of accessible and affordable housing. Denial of requests of reasonable accommodations and modifications is an issue the disability community continues to face.

Beyond housing, curb cuts and sidewalks remain inaccessible. There are issues with accessibility and walkability in the community for individuals with vision and hearing disabilities. Public spaces also remain inaccessible, including the War Memorial building which has shower curtains on bathroom stalls instead of doors.

**Questions:**

- A. *What plans do you have to increase housing opportunities for people with disabilities including both persons under 62 years old as well as senior citizens? (i.e., aging in place, build senior apartments, decrease senior violence, rental subsidies, tax credits/relief, rental assistance)*
- B. *How can you decrease the number of complaints of housing discrimination based on disability in Baltimore City?*
- C. *How can you learn more about the needs of people with disabilities in housing?*
- D. *How can the City further provide additional housing support services and options for individuals with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities?*

**10. Ending Homelessness**

The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) recently released new data showing there was a 12% increase in homelessness in the United States between 2022 and 2023. This reflects the highest number of people reported as being unhoused since this data reporting began

in 2007, and the highest annual increase on record. In addition to the overall increase in homelessness, increases occurred across all populations. The number of families with children experiencing homelessness rose by 16%, unaccompanied youth rose by 15%, veterans rose by 7%, and the number of people who became homeless for the first time rose by 25%.

Unfortunately, increases in homelessness have been met with growing efforts across the country to criminalize unhoused people for engaging in life sustaining activities like sleeping outside. The U.S. Supreme Court has agreed to hear the case of *Grants Pass v. Johnson* to decide whether arresting and jailing unhoused people for sleeping outside with a blanket, pillow, or sheet of cardboard to lie on violates the Eighth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution against cruel and unusual punishment. Once decided, local governments will be faced with making decisions on local law, policies and practices. Baltimore City already has a long history of closing homeless encampments without providing permanent housing to encampment residents, including as recent as January 2024.

Permanent affordable housing, including permanent supportive housing, is the primary solution to ending homelessness. Yet the Baltimore City Mayor's Office of Homeless Services (MOHS) has struggled to effectively operate its HUD-funded housing programs, including failing to seek timely reimbursement of HUD funds and failing to pay rent timely to private landlords resulting in eviction actions against permanent supportive housing tenants. MOHS has also struggled to consistently engage with individuals with lived experience of homelessness and provide opportunities to be an equal partner in planning and decision making for MOHS programs.

People who identify as Black or African American continue to be overrepresented among the unhoused community. In the United States, 13% of the population is Black, yet Black people account for 37% of people experiencing homelessness. In Baltimore City, 62% of the population is Black, but 73% of individuals and 85% of families experiencing homelessness are Black. Baltimore is no stranger to the history of racially discriminatory housing practices like redlining and restrictive covenants. Unfortunately, discriminatory practices in housing continue albeit in different forms. Even when housing is available, people experiencing homelessness face many barriers to accessing housing, including screening for prior evictions and criminal records, and policies and practices that have a disparate impact on individuals using housing vouchers.

Baltimore City Public Schools have identified over 4,000 children and youth experiencing homelessness as defined in the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. In addition, homelessness among unaccompanied youth and young adults, or young people who are not part of a family or accompanied by a parent or guardian, is rising, as noted above. LGBTQ+ youth, as well as youth exiting foster care or juvenile and adult carceral systems, are at particularly high risk. Despite urgent need, Baltimore City has no community-based emergency shelter resources for minors experiencing homelessness and only one designated shelter for transition-aged youth ages 18-24. Targeted supportive housing programs for young adults are also insufficient to meet the need.

Questions:

- A. *What steps will you take to ensure that unhoused persons in Baltimore City are not criminalized?*
- B. *Would you commit to stop encampment closures unless decent, safe, affordable permanent housing is available to encampment residents?*
- C. *What steps would you take to ensure that housing programs operated by MOHS and its grantees are meeting rent obligations and providing high quality supportive services to the tenants?*
- D. *What steps would you take to ensure that the unhoused community is given decision-making power over policies and programs related to ending homelessness?*
- E. *Would you support a local law prohibiting landlords from denying housing to people with past criminal legal system involvement?*
- F. *What action would you take to prevent homelessness for youth exiting foster care and juvenile services, and to expand shelter and housing resources for homeless youth, including unaccompanied minors?*