

Fixing DC's Residential Housing Inspections and Enforcement

The Problem: DCRA's Broken Culture and Lack of Tenant-Centered Mission Result in No Meaningful Code Enforcement for Tenants

- DCRA does not have a culture that prioritizes housing code violations, adequately resources residential housing inspections, or uses targeted enforcement against problem landlords.
- Consequently:
 - Enforcement fails at every step of the process: Initial and follow-up inspections are not scheduled or are delayed, and fines are rarely assessed or collected.
 - The agency lacks adequate resources, with far fewer inspectors and enforcement staff than in cities like Baltimore. (eg. DC has ~15 residential inspectors while Baltimore has ~95).
 - No public health lens used to inform policies/enforcement practices.
 - No database or data collected regarding housing code violations or enforcement.
 - No strategic enforcement occurs.
- Low-income tenants are left in unsafe and unhealthy housing with little recourse.

The Solution: An Agency with a Singular Mission to Protect DC's Tenants

1. Culture and Mission Change: DC has ~180,000 occupied rental housing units. We need an agency whose sole purpose is to protect our city's renters.
 - An agency with a mission of protecting tenants will draw public servants with commitment to tenants' well-being and health.
 - The agency's director should be quasi-independent and not beholden to mayoral politics.
 - The agency should be centered around a focus on public health and safety.
 - The agency should be responsive, user-friendly, and transparent.
 - Tenants should be able to access a one-stop shop for housing conditions issues.
2. Effective Enforcement: The agency should have an efficient and targeted strategic enforcement regime, informed by the agency's public health focus.
3. Appropriately Resourced: The agency should be adequately staffed in inspections and enforcement, with sufficient funding for the agency to abate unresolved and serious violations harmful to health/safety.
 - A minimum number of inspectors per number of rental units should be required by statute. Should align with comparable jurisdictions.
 - Should have sufficient enforcement personnel to ensure violations can be thoroughly prosecuted.
4. Strategic Focus: The agency should collect and use data in strategic enforcement against problem landlords, in conjunction with sister agencies and OAG where appropriate.