



José G. Pérez
City of Milwaukee Common Council

The Housing Authority Must Be Brought to Account

**Statement from Common Council President José G. Pérez
September 20, 2023**

For some time, Common Council members, community representatives, and most importantly, residents of properties operated by the Housing Authority of the City of Milwaukee (HACM), have been concerned about the way the HACM conducts its business. Anecdotes of unsafe and unsanitary conditions, billing irregularities, inattentive managers, and slovenly bookkeeping were heard from various quarters, with many of these issues predating current city leadership.

Many Council members have long grappled with how best to oversee the HACM, which is not a formal City agency, despite its long relationship with our government. It has been a point of frustration to identify what falls into the Common Council's purview and what does not. One possible solution the Council can enforce would be to end a longstanding "handshake agreement" between our Department of Neighborhood Services and the HACM, under which the latter was treated differently from every other landlord and has been able to avoid regular inspections and enforcement for noncompliance.

On Monday, September 25, 2023, the Steering and Rules Committee will take up an ordinance that accomplishes this goal by directing the Department of Neighborhood Services to inspect and, if necessary, cite the HACM for violations of our ordinances. It is well past time the city's second largest landlord play by the same rules as everyone else.

The public release of the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development's review of the HACM's Housing Choice Voucher program has made clear how dysfunctional the authority's operations have become, and underscores the need for action, such as that in the proposed ordinance. The report is a damning account of inefficiency, incompetence, and a fundamental lack of accountability, all involving public funds intended to benefit some of our most vulnerable residents. Recommendations were made for improvements that were, it seems, never carried out. I have written to the author of this review to ask how the HACM will be held accountable for not following previous recommendations and what will be done to ensure they are followed in the future.

I look forward to a transparent and productive conversation on these issues related to the HACM at Monday's committee meeting.

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