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Mayor Michelle Wu &
Boston City Councilors

Boston City Hall
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March 5, 2025

Dear Mayor Wu and Boston City Councilors,

I am writing to provide some updates and context on an ongoing maintenance transformation at the Boston Housing Authority. As you have likely seen in the press, last week the HUD OIG published a long-delayed report into maintenance challenges at the BHA over 2022 and 2023, in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The period covered by the report is technically March 2019 to March 2023, but inspections and non-emergency in-unit work was suspended for housing authorities across America for most of 2020 and 2021, due to the public health emergency. This meant that in 2022 countless housing authorities, including ours, faced an avalanche of deferred maintenance. At the same time, low salaries and a tight labor market meant that BHA was hampered by an enormous amount of turnover and vacancies in front-line staff. As a result, when the HUD OIG arrived to inspect units in the first half of 2023, it found a large number of deficiencies that had not been satisfactorily addressed. This was the situation when I arrived as Administrator in August 2023.

The quality of housing for our residents is BHA's primary mission, and these results were unacceptable. Accordingly, we have been working since 2023 to address the issues raised in the OIG audit by fundamentally overhauling and modernizing our maintenance systems.

In summer 2023, the BHA began this overhaul by changing its protocols so that expert licensed inspectors now inspect every BHA unit, every year. Initially, this new level of scrutiny hugely increased the number of recorded work orders, but it gave the agency confidence that we had an accurate sense of all in-unit issues.

Labor negotiations over 2023 also enabled BHA to raise its salaries to become more competitive in the labor market again, allowing it to refill a number of vacant positions.

In winter 2024, we reorganized our maintenance regions to create more efficient teams, so that we could better use our too-scarce resources in service of our residents, and created a new Asset Management Division.

Beginning in July 2024, we started the enormous task of transitioning our longstanding paper work order system to a digital one. This conversion was completed on November 1, 2024; we are now in our fifth month of a fully digital system. This has been transformative for our ability to accurately track work order completion, as under the paper system there could previously be weeks of delay between when a work order was done and when it was formally closed out. Given these delays, the BHA could not reliably provide accurate data to entities such as the OIG, nor did it have a clear birds-eye-view of the work outstanding at any given time.

We now have that birds-eye-view, and are able to target our resources accordingly. Under our new Chief of Maintenance & Inspections, who took on that role on November 1, 2024, we have dramatically decreased our numbers of open work orders in BHA units. The counts over the past five months have declined as follows:

BHA Open In-Unit Work Orders

DATE	# W.O.
October 11, 2024	17,059
October 30, 2024	16,469
November 25, 2024	13,752
December 30, 2024	8,622
January 27, 2025	5,510
February 3, 2025	5,079
February 10, 2025	4,316
February 18, 2025	3,879
February 24, 2025	3,686
March 3, 2025	2,936

This huge reduction has taken enormous effort by our BHA maintenance team. That workforce is made up of a dedicated staff of Laborers, Building Trades members, and Teamsters, and I would be remiss not to emphasize the importance of their hard work. This same team is also rapidly addressing each emergency work order that arises. We respond to all emergency work calls within less than 24 hours, and then we sometimes schedule additional follow-up work before closing those work orders out. Since January 1, such emergency work orders have been fully resolved at BHA in an average of 1.7 days.

We still have more to do. For example, last year the BHA also hired a new Director of Customer Service, and we are currently focused on building out the most responsive possible call center for dealing sensitively and effectively with resident and other customer complaints.

I wish to reassure you, however, that we are taking every step possible to achieve these needed organizational improvements as quickly as we can. Our residents deserve the safest and most high-quality affordable housing that we can provide. I wake up every morning thinking about how we can deliver on that vital mission despite our limited resources.

I do not need to tell you, I know, how crucial it is that the federal government support this work through adequate federal funding. With a possible government shutdown looming next week, I hope you will all lend your voices to the need for uninterrupted and unreduced funding for HUD's public housing program.

I know that we can count on each of you to robustly support our public housing residents, and I look forward to continuing to work in partnership together to invest in the homes we at BHA are so proud to provide.

Sincerely,



Kenzie Bok
BHA Administrator