

June 13, 2022

Mayor Joe Hogsett  
City of Indianapolis  
200 Washington Street  
Indianapolis, IN 46204

Marcia Lewis  
Interim Executive Director  
Indianapolis Housing Agency  
1935 N. Meridian Street  
Indianapolis, IN 46202

Dear Mayor Hogsett and Ms. Lewis:

Today, the undersigned organizations, demand the Indianapolis Housing Agency (IHA) and the City of Indianapolis immediately take action to address the emergency housing crisis that residents of IHA properties and Marion County housing choice voucher holders are experiencing.

Recently, the *Indy Star* published a [detailed review](#) of significant housing issues being experienced by IHA residents and consumers. Other news organizations have published shorter accounts, highlighting the daily struggles of recipients of IHA products and services. The majority of information provided to date has been through news stories highlighting mismanagement, potential fraud, and the complete lack of accountability to IHA's tenants and voucher holders. Tenants in need are not being responded to and critical funding is not being sought. News organizations have done a better job notifying the public of needs than IHA or the City has done to date.

It is imperative that IHA be a viable, well-run organization to provide safe, habitable, and affordable housing options for its nearly 600 public housing residents and 9,000 voucher holders. IHA states its mission "is to be a top-performing agency that Provides quality and affordable housing; Contributes to safe communities; Encourages individual and family self-sufficiency; and Affirmatively promotes fair housing." It is currently failing its mission, its consumers, and our city.

IHA has been completely derelict in meeting its duties, resulting in unsafe housing conditions and loss of housing options. Most alarming, the *Indy Star* documented 4,731 open emergency work orders that have been unmet resulting in tenants having to stay in unsafe housing conditions including non-working elevators, air conditioning outages, and insect and rodent infestations. The horrific conditions documented in the *Indy Star* article as well as calls to the Fair Housing Center of Central Indiana must be immediately addressed.

Housing choice voucher holders are also being penalized for IHA's ineptitude through loss of needed housing options, long-term ramifications of unpaid rent, and additional stigmatizing by landlords of the use of the voucher program - a program in which many holders struggle to locate housing providers to even accept their vouchers [80-90% of the time](#). IHA must streamline the voucher process to make it more usable by tenants and landlords, particularly as IHA shifts its public housing residents to vouchers. IHA must do its part in running an effective program by completing paperwork efficiently, processing inspections quickly, making timely payments to landlords, and keeping voucher holders updated as to any concerns or problems. The Fair Housing Center of Central Indiana and legal services organizations have received complaints about the struggles of voucher holders that have put them further at risk of homelessness due to their inability to effectively use their vouchers as intended. The Fair Housing Center of Central Indiana has received several calls from voucher holders who are unable to find housing with their voucher or who are experiencing hardship because IHA is not moving fast enough to complete the needed paperwork and inspection to process their voucher. For example, just recently in Lawrence Township court a woman shared that she was sleeping on the floor of a friend's house because she could not find a landlord to take her voucher, which was due to expire in a few weeks.

A previous [FOX 59 story](#) noted of a recently filed whistleblower complaint: "The complaint details an alleged web of insider dealing, conflicts of interest and fraud in the purchase, sale and development of typically distressed properties in Indianapolis supposedly in pursuit of the goal of providing affordable housing for low-income residents but often to the benefit of well-connected industry insiders, public employees, elected officials, developers and lenders." There has been no transparency in sharing with the public the issues or specifics of the allegations raised in this complaint.

The mishaps of IHA's financial struggles cannot fall upon the very people it is supposed to serve. IHA was designed to serve an integral role in our community by providing housing opportunities for those most at-need. The tenants being impacted by IHA's dysfunction are those most vulnerable to housing loss and already experiencing long-term housing inequities and disparities. IHA's current tenants and voucher holders have an average household income of about \$13,000 per year with 80% designated as extremely low income. IHA residents and voucher holders are 80% female-headed households and 44% have children in the home. Twenty three percent are persons with disabilities and 87% of IHA's residents and voucher holders are Black. Twenty five percent are working residents and 67% have other sources of income or assistance but do not make enough to otherwise afford Indianapolis's rental housing prices.

More must be done and we need to see leadership treat this like the crisis it is. We demand immediate action.

The City of Indianapolis must:

- Immediately begin the recruitment of a new IHA director to minimize turmoil and provide leadership stability;
- Provide monthly updates to the public on the status of this recruitment and hiring process; and
- Assist IHA residents in obtaining funds for organization of a tenant union, if so desired by residents.

IHA must:

- Establish a publicized and centralized call-in number and email address for reporting of administrative and maintenance issues with a guarantee that an IHA staff member will respond within 24-48 hours if not an emergency. There must also be a tracking mechanism for IHA and resident follow up related to the complaint. Each property should also post these updates in a centralized area of their building for those unable to access the website.
- Increase transparency on the IHA website designating a page specifically for community updates related to the transition and problems. In addition:
  - Ensure any web listing of IHA's current Board of Commissioners is current and updated when changes are made.
  - Provide an online archive of agenda and meeting minutes of the Board of Commissioners and update the website timely.
  - Provide advance notice of public meetings and how interested persons may participate.
  - Publish HUD reports for community review online and keep updated timely.
  - Provide weekly updates on the status of emergency repairs (including numbers of completed and pending), what is being prioritized, and timeline for remaining repairs.
- For voucher holders, implement a 48 hour response time, a process for recertification streamlining, inspections conducted within two weeks, and a new notification process for landlord violations and remedy - holding the landlord accountable instead of the tenant;
- Any transfer of IHA properties to private ownership must be disclosed and allowed to be vetted by the public. Tenants in Indianapolis have received extremely harsh treatment and loss of rights resulting in years of litigation by out-of-state companies purchasing housing units in our city – this cannot happen in these sales.
- Full compliance with Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) requirements by ensuring IHA property residents and any new voucher holders will be given the necessary notice and assistance, especially for those with disabilities, during the transition to new management from IHA to private corporations, if sales proceed.
- Work to address the blatant discrimination its constituents experience on a daily basis in their search for housing with a housing choice voucher and a commitment that IHA will not be a reason as to why these vouchers were denied or refused.

Well-run public housing authorities are present all across our nation. IHA has not been serving its consumers effectively for several years. The time is now for more drastic and committed action to occur. We send this letter in support of the tenants and consumers of IHA.

Signed,

Dr. Wayne L. Moore  
President  
Baptist Minister's Alliance

The Very Reverend Gray Lesesne  
Dean and Rector  
Christ Church Cathedral

Rev. David W. Greene, Sr.  
President  
Concerned Clergy of Indianapolis

Amy Nelson  
Executive Director  
Fair Housing Center of Central Indiana

Michael Chapuran  
Executive Director  
Family Promise of Greater Indianapolis

Rabbi Aaron Spiegel  
President  
Greater Indianapolis Multifaith Network, Inc.

Fran Quigley  
Professor  
Health and Human Rights Clinic - Indiana  
University McKinney School of Law

Tracey Hutchings-Goetz  
Communications Director  
Hoosier Action

Kayla Bledsoe  
Manager of Policy and Resource Initiatives  
Immigrant Welcome Center

Laura Berry, MA  
Executive Director  
Indiana Coalition Against Domestic  
Violence, Inc.

Melissa Keyes  
Executive Director  
Indiana Disability Rights

Amber O'Haver  
Executive Director  
Indiana Statewide Independent Living  
Council (INSILC)

Anne-Marie Taylor  
Executive Director  
Indianapolis Neighborhood Resource  
Center

Tony Mason  
President & CEO  
Indianapolis Urban League

Dr. Lionel T. Rush  
President  
Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance

Pambana Uishi  
Kheprw Institute/Homes For All Indy

Amina B. Pierson, MAED  
Executive Director  
Martindale Brightwood Community  
Development Corporation

Dr. Stephen J. Clay  
National Action Network of Indiana

Beryl Cohen  
Executive Director  
National Association of Social Workers  
Indiana Chapter

Rachel Nelson  
Executive Director  
NeighborLink Indianapolis

Dolly Craft, Elder  
Northminster Presbyterian Church

Claire Holba  
Executive Director  
Patchwork Indy, Inc.

Betty Brandt  
Director of Community for Contemplation &  
Justice  
St. Luke's United Methodist Church

Derris Ross  
CEO & Founder  
The Ross Foundation

Ashley Gurvitz  
Chief Executive Officer - Executive Director  
United Northeast CDC/Alliance for  
Northeast Unification

cc: Michael Allen, Chairperson, IHA Board of Commissioners  
Indianapolis City-County Council