

Richmond City Council
City of Richmond
900 East Broad St
Richmond, VA. 23219

November 10, 2025

Re: Proposed Proactive Rental Inspection Program: Ord 2025-161

To: Richmond City Council

As the city's public health professionals, we write to document our assessment of the potential impact to public health and health equity of the proposal to establish a proactive rental inspection policy.

We find clear evidence for a positive impact to public health and health equity in our city as a result of this proposal. The proposed ordinance has the important potential to identify and correct housing issues that cause significant health problems. The positive impacts should be most significant in three areas: childhood lead poisoning, in-home accidents, and asthma. The positive impacts should come both from the violations that are corrected because of inspections and from the proactive steps many landlords may take prior to inspections.

Specific background and analysis relevant to the health impacts of the proposed ordinance include:

- Childhood lead poisoning: In 2024, 113 Richmond children were poisoned by lead.¹ Almost all of these were caused by lead paint dust and chipping, peeling and flaking paint.² VDH lists Richmond children as being at "very high" risk of lead poisoning.³ Children that are poisoned by lead have mild to moderate intellectual development issues and reduced self-control.⁴ These impacts disproportionately impact people of color and the poor who have greater exposure to lead and statistically significantly higher blood lead levels.⁵ Prevention of lead exposure is the optimal strategy for dealing with lead because of the irreversible effects of lead.⁶ Prevention of exposure to lead is effectively accomplished by eliminating the lead paint or by keeping the lead paint well maintained to prevent lead dust, chips or flakes.⁷ Repainting the interior of a home will reduce lead poisoning as will fixing areas of peeling and chipping paint. Rental inspection

¹ Internal VDH Data

² Unpublished RHHD Data

³ [Information for Parents – Lead Safe](#)

⁴ Prevention of Childhood Lead Toxicity, American Academy of Pediatrics, 2016

⁵ Teye SO, Yanosky JD, Cuffee Y, Weng X, Luquis R, Farace E, Wang L. Exploring persistent racial/ethnic disparities in lead exposure among American children aged 1-5 years: results from NHANES 1999-2016. *Int Arch Occup Environ Health*. 2021 May;94(4):723-730. doi: 10.1007/s00420-020-01616-4. Epub 2021 Jan 4. PMID: 33394180.

⁶ Prevention of Childhood Lead Toxicity, American Academy of Pediatrics, 2016

⁷ Wilson J, Pivetz T, Ashley P, Jacobs D, Strauss W, Menkedick J, Dixon S, Tsai HC, Brown V, Friedman W, Warren Galke, Clark S. Evaluation of HUD-funded lead hazard control treatments at 6 years post-intervention. *Environ Res*. 2006 Oct;102(2):237-48. doi: 10.1016/j.envres.2006.04.007. Epub 2006 Jun 5. PMID: 16740256.

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program should result in reductions in lead poisonings as the city's guidelines require that peeling, chipping, flaking paint be repaired or removed.

- In-home accidents: 18,000 deaths related to injuries occur annually in U.S. homes and 12 million nonfatal injuries occur annually in U.S. homes.⁸ 1,051 Virginians died from falls in their homes in 2022.⁹ While some falls are not caused by rental unit quality issues, significant numbers come from defects in the home, including from stairs that are faulty or have weak handrails. Since inspections require stairs and handrails to be in good condition, a proactive rental inspection can end these defects and reduce the number of injuries in properties subject to inspection districts enabled by this ordinance. Inspectors ensuring that refrigerators are working properly can reduce the incidence of food poisoning from spoiled food. A rental inspection program can also result in more functioning smoke detectors and, when working smoke alarms are present in the home, the risk of dying in a home fire is cut by 60 percent. A study found that if every home in the US had a working smoke alarm, residential fire deaths could drop by 36%.¹⁰
- Asthma: 26,839 Richmonders (11.7% of the population), including 1,919 RPS students, have asthma.¹¹ ¹² The Asthma and Allergy Foundation ranked Richmond as the 12th worst city in the nation for asthma in 2024.¹³ Asthma sufferers have more doctor visits, more missed school and work days and higher health care costs than non-asthma sufferers.¹⁴ Asthma has a disproportionate impact on people of color, as asthma-related hospitalization rates nationally for blacks are six times higher than for whites,¹⁵ and black children in Virginia have twice the asthma prevalence of white children.¹⁶ Studies suggest that well maintained apartments cause half the number of young children to develop asthma as badly maintained apartments.¹⁷ Living in a home in good repair reduces the number of missed school days by 27% and missed work by 37%.¹⁸ Inspections can cite apartments with pest harborages, water leaks, holes, and faulty

⁸ HUD, *Everyone Deserves a Safe and Healthy Home*,

⁹ National Safety Council: [Deaths by State - Injury Facts \(nsc.org\)](https://www.nsc.org/deaths-by-state-injury-facts)

¹⁰ NFPA [Learn More About Smoke Alarms](https://www.nfpa.org/learn-more-about-smoke-alarms)

¹¹ Richmond Public Schools, 2022-2023 school year. This is self-reported data and may therefore be an undercount

¹² 2022, Virginia Department of Health, <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/data/chronic-disease-in-virginia/prevalence/>

¹³ Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, (2025). 2025 Allergy Capitals. Retrieved from [How the Top 100 U.S. Cities Rank for Seasonal Pollen Allergies](https://www.aafa.org/cities-rank-for-seasonal-pollen-allergies)

¹⁴ Song HJ, Blake KV, Wilson DL, Winterstein AG, Park H. Medical Costs and Productivity Loss Due to Mild, Moderate, and Severe Asthma in the United States. *J Asthma Allergy*. 2020 Oct 29;13:545-555. doi: 10.2147/JAA.S272681. PMID: 33149626; PMCID: PMC7605920.

¹⁵ Santo, L., Kang, K. (2023). *National Hospital Ambulatory Medical Care Survey: 2019 national summary tables* (cdc:123251). 76. <https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/123251>

¹⁶ VDH, 2018 Asthma Burden Report.

¹⁷ "Reduced prevalence of childhood asthma after housing renovation in an under resourced community", Beck et al, 2023, *Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology*

¹⁸ Green & Healthy Homes Initiative: Improving Health, Economic, and Social Outcomes Through Integrated Housing Intervention, Ruth Ann Norton and Brendan Wade Brown, 2014

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ventilation systems, all of which can exacerbate or trigger events for those that suffer from asthma. These inspections can result in apartments that are maintained better and will result in fewer negative health impacts related to asthma.

Rental inspections programs in Virginia and across the country have been very successful. Residential fires in Asheville, N.C. fell by 50% after proactive rental inspection.¹⁹ A proactive rental inspection program contributed to an 83 percent decline in elevated blood lead levels among children in Monroe County, NY between 1994 and 2011.²⁰ In addition, RHHD reviewed similar programs in 13 Virginia localities. All of those we had direct contact with recommended other cities set up a proactive rental inspection program.²¹

In summation, the Health District finds that this proposed proactive rental inspection program can improve health and health equity in the city by facilitating a means to identify and address some housing conditions that negatively impact health. If the Council approves this ordinance, RHHD is happy to assist with any of the engagement and outreach work associated with establishing inspection districts.

Thank you for your time,

Bob Becker

Bob Becker
Housing Equity Advisor
Richmond and Henrico Health Districts

¹⁹ Carol Hickey, Masters Thesis, UNC, 2008 Ensuring Housing Quality

²⁰ [Lead-safe homes and... | Results for America - Economic Mobility Catalog](#)

²¹ RHHD informal survey, May 15, 2025