

# OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL CITY OF BALTIMORE



**Isabel Mercedes Cumming**  
**Inspector General**

## **Investigative Report Synopsis**

**OIG Case # 22-0023-I**

**Issued: August 22, 2023**



OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL  
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City Hall, Suite 635  
100 N. Holliday Street  
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August 22, 2023

Dear Citizens of Baltimore City,

The mission of the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) is to promote accountability, efficiency, and integrity in City government, as well as to investigate complaints of fraud, financial waste, and abuse.

The Office of the Inspector General (OIG) received a complaint alleging a Department of Housing and Community Development building inspector engaged in corruption with a contractor to approve a Use and Occupancy (U&O) permit for a residential building. The OIG was unable to substantiate the complaint. However, while investigating the allegations, the OIG learned of two areas of concern that may benefit from further DHCD management review.

### **POTENTIAL BRIBES**

The OIG learned that DHCD building inspectors are generally the sole City representative on-site with a contractor or property owner present during their inspections. Building Inspectors are not required to submit any documentation to a supervisor for approval before passing or failing an inspection.

The investigation revealed that, according to two inspectors, contractors had offered money or gift cards during inspections. A building inspector (Building Inspector 1) detailed a recent incident when an unknown contractor attempted to give them an envelope containing multiple \$100 bills, suggesting it was for lunch. Building Inspector 1 refused the offer and documented the incident in their inspection notes. Another inspector (Building Inspector 2) described an incident when a contractor gave them money after an inspection. Building Inspector 2 stated they reported it to a manager but was informed that they could keep the money because it was under an allowable dollar limit. However, Building Inspector 2 was uncertain if a written policy exists for DHCD to support this guidance.

The OIG spoke with a DHCD supervisor (DHCD Supervisor) and reviewed policy documents for inspection and permit procedures but could not locate any formal guidance for Building Inspectors to reference when an offer of money or gift occurs. Any money or gifts accepted by a Building Inspector intended for their personal use from a contractor could be subject to criminal penalty under the Maryland Code §9-201, Bribery of a Public Employee.

### **BUILDING INSPECTOR DISCRETION**

Regarding the level of discretion that Building Inspectors have when inspecting a property, the DHCD Supervisor said that Building Inspectors can pass a U&O inspection if minor items still need to be completed, such as a missing handrail or a step that needs repair. The DHCD Supervisor and multiple Building Inspectors reported an inspector's discretion is limited and not applicable to safety items. The OIG reviewed the International Property Maintenance Code (IPMC) standard for handrails and guardrails, which is incorporated in the City of Baltimore's Building, Fire, and Related Codes. Building Inspectors also utilize a checklist during U&O inspections to document if steps and stairways have handrails where needed.

#### **REPORT FRAUD, WASTE AND ABUSE**

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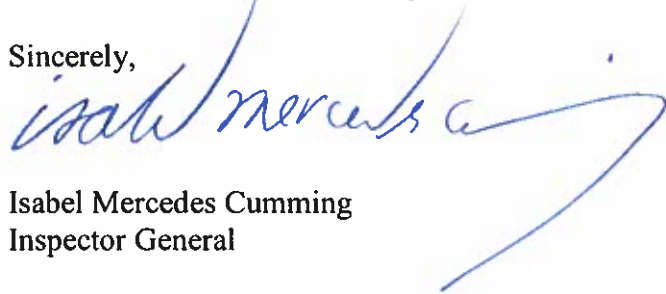
*This public synopsis is only a summary of a more comprehensive report of investigation submitted to the appropriate City management official*

According to the DHCD Supervisor, there is no policy detailing an inspector's discretion, but Building Inspectors would still need to return to the property later and follow up on the minor repair. The DHCD Supervisor confirmed the follow-up would be informal and not documented. However, several Building Inspectors said they or other inspectors would accept photos for some repairs. An experienced building inspector (Building Inspector 3) asserted they would still fail a property for a missing handrail because the property owner or the inspector could forget to complete a follow-up if it is initially approved.

### **INVESTIGATIVE FINDINGS**

The OIG recommends DHCD require Building Inspectors to report any bribery attempts to the OIG immediately when they occur. In addition, DHCD developing a formal reporting and documentation process for inspectors when an attempted bribe occurs would assist with protecting an inspector's integrity and increasing awareness among DHCD Building Inspectors of a potentially corrupt contractor. The OIG also suggests DHCD management review and determine if formal guidelines should be created for the discretion used by Building Inspectors on minor items.

Sincerely,



Isabel Mercedes Cumming  
Inspector General

CC: Hon. Brandon M. Scott, Mayor of Baltimore City  
Hon. Nick Mosby, Baltimore City Council President  
Hon. Bill Henry, Baltimore City Comptroller  
Honorable Members of the Baltimore City Council  
Hon. Ebony Thompson, Acting Baltimore City Solicitor