

**Baltimore City Health
Department (BCHD)
Response**

Case # 23-0005-I



1001 E. Fayette Street • Baltimore, Maryland 21202
Brandon M. Scott, Mayor
Letitia Dzirasa, M.D., Commissioner of Health

MEMORANDUM

TO: Isabel Mercedes Cumming, Inspector General

FROM: Letitia Dzirasa, M.D., Commissioner of Health

SUBJECT: Response to Case 23-0005-I

DATE: April 4, 2023

This memo is written in response to your report dated March 14, 2023, regarding your Office's findings for a complaint received that alleged the Baltimore City Health Department's (BCHD) lease of the Hebrew Orphan Asylum (HOA) building was fiscally wasteful due to the lack of occupancy and limited use of the building. The HOA total square footage is 26,053 and 8,000 of that is rented to BHSB for \$1 annually under a sub-lease for the Stabilization Center. That nets 18,053 sq. ft.

I wish to thank you for bringing these matters to my attention and for your team's thorough and professional investigation. I appreciate the time your office dedicated to understanding the importance of our City's first ever Stabilization Center, which is housed at the HOA, in combatting the opioid crisis and the unique role this building continues to play in our COVID-19 response efforts.

BCHD agrees with your findings and recommendations and, as it has in the past, we will continue to work with Coppin Heights Community Development Corporation (CHCDC), to identify potential tenants. For clarity, the lease was entered into June 20, 2017, but payment of rent was for lease-year one (1) of the 15-year lease was triggered by completion and occupancy by the Stabilization Center on April 1, 2020. At that time, the remainder of the building was unfinished and unusable. Through the use of CARES funding, we were able to complete the 2nd and 3rd floors for use as a COVID Contact Tracing and Call Center which began operation in April 2021. The 1st floor of the building was completed using ARPA funding in June 2022. In addition to the CHCDC, we will also work with other City agencies, some of whom have expressed recent interest in the space, in finding appropriate additional uses for any unused space in the building.

Please know that all of us at BCHD stand firmly on the side of transparency and accountability. We are committed to our core mission of improving health and combatting disparities and the important work conducted at the HOA is part of that. Thank you for bringing attention to this work.