

Dear Chairman Comer, Ranking Member Garcia, and Members of the House Committee on Oversight and Accountability:

I write to request oversight of the DC Department of Buildings (DC DOB) Proactive Inspection Program, a recent initiative requiring routine inspections of rental properties across the District. While ensuring safe housing is a shared priority, this program raises serious concerns regarding legal authority, implementation, tenant and owner consent, and overall effectiveness. It also presents a threshold question: Why is the District introducing proactive inspections when it has struggled to effectively enforce the violations it already identifies?

Public reporting, resident allegations, and past incidents point to ongoing deficiencies within DOB's existing enforcement framework including:

- Ineffective enforcement and unresolved violations
- Over-reliance on self-certification, allowing landlords to attest that violations are corrected without independent verification
- Delays in fine collection
- Documented cases of permit-related bribery and improper expediting practices
- Broader federal scrutiny of a “culture of corruption” across DC agencies
- Allegations of punitive or inconsistent enforcement actions

Notably, prior failures in inspection and oversight, such as the structural crisis at the Talbert Street/Grandview condominium development in Anacostia, led to the creation of a multi-agency District task force to manage displacement, financial relief, and remediation for affected residents. While responsive efforts are necessary, such interventions highlight the consequences of inadequate oversight and raise further concern about expanding enforcement authority without first ensuring competence and accountability.

Accordingly, I request that the Committee review the following:

1. Legal Authority

- Under what statutory or regulatory authority did DOB initiate routine, non-complaint-based inspections of occupied rental units?

2. Impact on Property Owners & Tenants

- What legal notice requirements and consent standards govern entry into occupied units?

3. Effectiveness & Enforcement Integrity

- What measurable improvements in housing safety or code compliance can be directly attributed to this program?

4. Cost & Resource Allocation

- What is the annual cost of the program, including staffing and administrative overhead?

5. Targeting & Implementation

- How are properties selected for inspection, and what criteria determine inspection frequency and prioritization?

Expanding enforcement without demonstrable capacity, integrity, accountability, and results, risks reinforcing existing failures rather than resolving them. I respectfully request that the Committee initiate appropriate oversight of this program, including engagement with the DC Department of Buildings and relevant District agencies, and provide a briefing on its findings, including performance and enforcement data.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,
Lori Furstenberg
Chair, DC Chapter, The Conservative Caucus