



PERFORMANCE REVIEW OF WILLIE L. HINES, JR.

Executive Director, Housing Authority of the City of Milwaukee

Conducted by:

Tenants United HACM Residents and Common Ground

January, 2024

The mission of the Housing Authority of the City of Milwaukee (HACM) is “*to foster strong, resilient and inclusive communities by providing a continuum of high-quality housing options that support self-sufficiency, good quality of life, and the opportunity to thrive.*” The job of the HACM Executive Director is to lead a staff to implement this mission.

RECOMMENDATION

Our performance review, conducted over the past 12 months, indicates that Executive Director Willie L. Hines Jr., has failed to effectively implement the mission of HACM and therefore **should be removed from his position. A national search should be conducted to find a qualified Executive Director.**

BACKGROUND

- Willie Hines was the Chairman of the Board of HACM for 16 years from 1998 to 2014.
- He became a “consultant” to Friends of Housing in 2014.
- He became the Assistant Executive Director of HACM in 2015.
- He became Executive Director in March of 2022.
- In total, he has been involved in the leadership of HACM for 25 years.

QUALIFICATIONS & HIRING CONCERNS

Willie Hines was President of the Common Council (annual salary \$82,749) prior to becoming paid staff for HACM. He resigned his Council seat and position on the HACM Board on January 31, 2014, effective the next day. Three days later, he went to work at HACM as the Associate Director (annual salary \$120,000) without going through the official application process.

Federal officials from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) made him resign because it was a “*conflict of interest.*” HUD wrote that Hines “*does not seem to possess the requisite qualifications, as required by [HACM’s] own job description for the position.*” Hines has never managed or directed a housing organization of any size, nor any type of organization with hundreds of employees.

In 2022, Hines was appointed Executive Director by a partially-filled board with just 4 of 7 members. There was no national search conducted. He had served on the Board with those 4 members for years prior to his appointment (annual salary \$240,000).

MISMANAGEMENT

Without sufficient qualifications and experience, Hines has mismanaged HACM, causing residents hardship and stress. Over the past year, Tenants United HACM residents and Common Ground leaders have documented some of Hines' failures. Here are 12 major categories:

- 1) **Section 8:** HACM administers Section 8 vouchers to approximately 7,823 families across Milwaukee—their largest program. In 2022, HUD warned of a “*serious risk of fraud, waste, and abuse*” under Hines’ leadership: 1,296 instances of illegal self-payments, “*procedural barriers*” to applicants, \$4 million of false bank reconciliations, “*intentional misreporting*” of expenses, an “*indeterminable*” overall cash position, and more. In January 2024, HUD required that HACM hire a third-party to “*manage and operate*” the program after continued failure, despite years of support and millions in consultants.
- 2) **Resident Privacy:** HACM frequently violates the Privacy Act of 1974. In April 2023, HUD identified confidential tenant information “*in walkways with boxes reaching nearly five feet tall, in stairwells stacked on desks where in many cases documents with applicant social security numbers, names and other PII was clearly visible to anyone passing by.*” We have documented similar cases—like Patrick Murphy, who on January 5, 2024, found his SSN, family history, income info., and more sitting on top of a communal dryer.
- 3) **Rent Mismanagement:** HACM mismanages resident rent, wrongfully taking money without acknowledgement or redress. We have encountered hundreds of examples: wrongful late fees, questionable monthly rent increases, “lost” payments that are cashed, sudden back rent stemming from HACM’s errors, failing to make accurate automatic withdrawals, and more. The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel did an investigation in August 2023. In the article, Legal Action of Wisconsin attorney Niabi Schmaltz stated “*it’s frequent enough to be concerning, and enough to establish patterns of mismanagement.*”
- 4) **Deferred Maintenance:** Residents live with mold, broken appliances, no heat, faulty repairs, and a lack of communication. Their physical health pays the price with sinus infections, lead poisoning, and shivers. In September 2023, we documented thousands of maintenance issues before a hearing with the Common Council. Hines has not addressed all of them. Even Teddi Minor at Becher Court, who spoke in front of the Council and Hines about her apartment flooding twice, black mold, losing \$4,000 of personal belongings, and reporting water leakage to HACM multiple times, still hears water dripping in her walls to this day.
- 5) **Rodents & Vermin:** HACM properties are infested with bed bugs, roaches, flies, mice, rats, and more. Hines’ approach is reactive and incomprehensive—like whack-a-mole: only if residents report issues will HACM spray that unit and the adjacent units above/below and to the left/right. This has property-wide consequences. Vivian Jones at Lapham Park has seen bugs spread throughout the building when residents with infestations walk to/from the laundry rooms. On February 27, 2023, Common Ground met with Willie Hines, explained this concern, and requested an RFP to pilot a more comprehensive, proactive approach at two properties. Although Hines put out an RFP, he refused to commit to a more comprehensive approach, so those buildings remain infested.

- 6) **Abusive Management:** Most of the staff that Hines hires and trains treat residents in a condescending manner, restrict their freedoms, ignore their questions and concerns, play favorites, lock communal rooms, ban families from visiting, and threaten to retaliate or evict residents. Savella McLauren, former manager, said HACM instructed her “*do not help residents.*” When Willie Hines began, she said the culture became: “*get the rent, get the rent, get the 14 day notices out, get the back rent.*” We hear from residents all over about bad management treating them like prisoners or children.
- 7) **Resident Safety:** Seniors, veterans, and people with disabilities are living in fear. Milwaukee Police Department call data shows HACM properties are horrifyingly unsafe. Locust Court, for example, had 302 calls for service in 2022: 56 “*life-threatening*” calls, 3 shootings, 10 shots fired, 23 batteries, 4 robberies, 2 sexual assaults, 6 property damages, and 19 threats. Other buildings are the same. Lapham Park had 238 MPD calls in 2022 and 196 in 9 months of 2023 data. In response, HACM’s new Chief of Public Safety, Marlon Davis (who Hines hired), told tenants to “*police yourselves.*” Davis was also overheard saying, “*residents are the problem. Residents are sneaky.*”
- 8) **Fire Evacuation Safety:** Hines has failed to ensure resident safety in the event of a fire, violating the Federal Fire Safety Act. Not all fire alarms or emergency lights function properly. Emergency exits are blocked. If fire plans exist, residents are not informed. For example, Cherry Court residents had to drag their disabled neighbors down the stairs when the alarm sounded in fall 2023. Three went to the hospital; one had broken bones.
- 9) **New Construction:** HACM’s wholly-owned subsidiary construction company, Travaux (of which Willie Hines is also the Chairman and President), mismanaged the construction of the “award-winning” Westlawn property, Victory Manor. Despite knowing about “*systemic*” issues from the beginning, Travaux failed to address them. Now, residents use space heaters and ovens to stay warm in a LEED-certified building. Millions of taxpayer dollars were squandered, and residents’ pay the price with their comfort and health.
- 10) **ADA Non-Compliance:** Hines has failed to make HACM units, buildings, and properties accessible for people with disabilities, violating the Americans with Disabilities Act. Robert Hacker at Lincoln Court cannot fit his wheelchair in his kitchen. One mom at Parklawn carries her son up and down the stairs in her unit because he has a condition similar to MS and cannot walk. The only bathroom is upstairs. As the boy is now 8, the mom fears injuring her back. She has called HACM multiple times requesting a one floor unit. She has submitted letters from doctors over the years. HACM has done nothing. Similarly, other properties have inaccessible gates blocking entrances, busted automatic door openers, or snow and ice blocking exits and walkways for weeks.
- 11) **Public Misrepresentations & Deceit:** As the public face of the Housing Authority, Willie Hines has deceived, misrepresented, and misled public officials and even the HACM Board for years. In front of the Common Council, Hines made over a dozen misleading or false claims. While Associate Director, Hines participated in knowingly misleading the HACM Board. In December 2022, HUD reported “*the Milwaukee Field Office has for the last eighteen months pointed out and provided suggestions for the quarterly financial report that HACM presents to its Board of Commissioners. This report*”

uses misleading financial metrics ... [indicating] 90% Housing Assistance Payment utilization when the number is on average closer to 70-75% utilization at any given time."

12) **Transparency & Responsiveness:** Hines has failed to respond to residents (customers) and the general public (taxpayers). Often residents' maintenance requests are ignored and their questions about rent or rent assistance go unanswered. Despite saying "*partnership with residents is paramount,*" Hines has not responded to dozens of tenants. For example, Betty Newton, President of Becher Court, sent Hines a letter with 101 petition signatures in 2023. He never responded. Felicia Shoates at Locust Court sent Hines a letter signed by 9 others on September 27, 2023, with 24 "Needs for Improvement." He never responded. Instead, Hines has hid from the media. Mayor Johnson said on December 21, 2023, "*questions certainly should be answered*" after Hines refused to sit down with TMJ4 despite repeated requests for an interview. Hines is threatening the financial health and reputation of HACM.