



**To:** Council Member Angela Whitfield-Calloway  
**From:** Miriam Blanks-Smart, Esq., Director  
Department of Appeals and Hearings  
**Date:** March 28, 2023  
**Re:** **Responses to Questions about Proposed FY 2024 Budget**

Please find below responses to your questions sent on 3/27/23 regarding the proposed Fiscal Year 2024 Proposed Budget for Department of Appeals and Hearings (DAH):

**1. QUESTION: What is the average wait time for an administrative hearing to be scheduled?**

The average number of days between the issuance of a blight violation ticket and the DAH hearing date is 34 days. Chapter 3 of the Detroit City Code requires a minimum of 14 days between issuance of a blight violation ticket and the hearing.

**2. QUESTION: Does DAH use an outside collection firm to collect outstanding blight tickets? If so, please explain the process and the rate of collection.**

The DAH has a contract with a collections law firm to collect outstanding blight judgments. A key part of the process is that the DAH's software system is integrated with the law firm's software system. This enables a "rapid response collections process" where all unpaid blight judgments are electronically placed with the law firm for collections on the 30<sup>th</sup> day after the judgment date. After one year of collections, the law firm's overall collection rate is 8.6%, while the collection rate for garnishment cases is 27%. The law firm is taking proactive, strategic steps to increase the number of garnishment filings and improve the overall collection rate.

**3. QUESTION: What new programs or projects are planned by DAH to improve enforcement of the Detroit City Code concerning blight, business license enforcement, or other municipal concerns?**

To increase compliance with the City's anti-blight ordinances, the DAH has recently implemented a 24-hour *interactive voice response* (IVR) system that allows citizens, property owners and residents to pay blights and get automated information about ticketing and hearings in a convenient and user-friendly format. Since the implementation of the IVR system, the number of phone payments now match the number of payments made on the payment kiosks and on the mobile app. Two other projects will be launched in FY 23. The DAH will conduct an online survey of litigants who attend DAH hearings to glean ways in which the City can increase property owners' knowledge of and adherence to blight compliance requirements. Further, before leaving the remote hearing on a blight ticket, the property owners will be provided links to compliance requirements from BSEED, DPW and the DAH payment link. Lastly, in FY 24, the DAH plans to restart its "Community Blight Court" to be focused on commercial



corridor blight enforcement in the Council Districts.

**4. QUESTION: Could DAH and its independent administrative show cause hearing officers handle the disputes between DWSD and its customers concerning billing and other issues?**

Yes, the DAH can handle billing and other disputes between DWSD and its customers. From 2016-2020, the DAH did conduct weekly administrative appeal hearings for DWSD customer disputes.

**5. QUESTION: Do the administrative hearing officers reflect the community that they serve? How many are Detroit residents? How many are female? How many are African American?**

The five attorneys who serve as DAH Administrative Hearings Officers represent the diversity of the community they serve, and they also reflect diverse legal experiences, including working as attorneys for tenants, the Michigan Court of Appeals and the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office. Four of the five administrative hearing officers are African American, and one is of Mexican American descent. There are three female and two male Administrative Hearings Officers, who all reside in Metro Detroit with one living in Detroit.

Signature: Miriam Blank Suvo

Date: 3/28/23