

February 12, 2014

Vanessa Reece  
2465 N. 26<sup>th</sup> Street  
Milwaukee, WI 53206

**RE: City of Milwaukee**

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing in regards to my home located at 2465 N. 26<sup>th</sup> Street. The following tax levy years are delinquent due to incurred re-inspection fees from the City of Milwaukee, Department of Neighborhood Services (DNS): 2012, 2013, and 2014. The following is the list of code violations that were acknowledged to be corrected: repair/replace defective electrical and plumbing system, removal of gasoline can from dwelling, discontinued use of illegal extensions cords, discontinued use of building as a rooming house, restore gas service, and restore electrical service. According to the DNS, if you have open ordinance on your home you are charged special inspection fees every month the work is not completed.

When my home was placarded in July of 2011, my elderly father was living in the home, he became sick and due to his impairment he was no longer able to keep the home habitable. I was residing out of state in Tennessee and could not handle the situation without being present; therefore, I moved back to Milwaukee, WI to help stabilize my father's health and find suitable housing. After securing gainful employment approximately 6 months later, I began making diligent efforts to comply with the code enforcement ordinances. The DNS was not able to offer any support, resources or information on how to solve this problem. I was taken advantage of by contractors who guaranteed the work but did not finish it or they completed it wrong, and my house was burglarized and vandalized several times, despite having an alarm system. My main electrical system was replaced 3x's due to theft of the wiring, my furnace, hot water heater, pipes were taken out of the walls, toilets, sinks, medicine cabinets, down sprouts and siding on my house had to be replaced causing me more hardship. Consequently, during the **ACTIVE REHABILITATION** of my home, more ordinances were added on to the list without given proper instructions on completing the ordinances causing a delay in complete abatement.

I am a first time home buyer and was not familiar with the placarded process; therefore, I continued to reach out to the DNS, the Alderman, Assessor's Office, Treasurer Office, and many individuals within the DNS building for support and to make them aware of the concerns and the adversity I was facing. I also made contact with the DNS Code Enforcement Division and explained the progress of my home and explained to them that I was working a full-time job and not able to meet on most occasions during the hours of 8:00 a.m. 5:00 p.m. due to my work schedule and trainings.

In an effort to comply with the City of Milwaukee ordinance and have my home abated in a timely manner; I reached out to the community based agencies and financial institutes for home improvement grants/loans such the Neighborhood Improvement Programs, Habitat for Humanity, Dominican Center for Women, Housing Resource Incorporation, Select Milwaukee but they only offered credit support or it was another dead end. However, based on the guidelines, delinquency of property taxes, and credit issues, I did not qualify for any loan improvement programs or grants to satisfy the code violations.

Personally, my last three years of wages has been contributed to maintaining my home in a secure and closed condition until I was able to occupy it again. In addition, death struck heavily in my family and I had to travel back and forth out of town to their funerals at my own expense. I also had a brother to be diagnosed with cancer and both my parents took sick; leaving me to care for them. I experienced an emotional/nervous breakdown for several months and was off work on Family Medical Leave to get myself together.

Due to unforeseen circumstances such as lack of understanding of the placarded process, unexpected expenses, and loss/support/sickness of loved one; it caused a tremendous emotional and financial set-back for me. This setback resulted in some of the work not being completed in a timely fashion. However; in spite of being financially deprived, I struggled to meet the demands of the ordinances.

As of August, 2014, the property was brought to building code compliance and all orders were closed out and the following repairs were made:

Scope of work completed on the inside of the home: repaired plumbing system (2x's due to incorrect use of piping of the first plumber), repaired electrical system (3x's due to vandalism), installed outlets/circuits, repaired/replaced receptacles, repaired/replaced fixtures, repaired/replaced furnace, replaced hot water heater, wash tub in the basement, replaced thermostat, replaced walls in lower bathroom (before walls could be closed, I had to get the walls fire blocked), replaced kitchen sink/faucet, and bedrooms, replaced walls in upper bedrooms, replaced toilets, sinks, medicine cabinets, replaced back door entrance and back upper deck door (lock/latches), kitchen flooring, bathroom flooring, replaced hand rails in back hallway, painted all walls and installed smoke/carbon and monoxide detectors in basement, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> floor.

Scope of work completed on the outside of the home: gutters/down sprouts: all around the home, shingles: roof repaired, deck: upper back porch and lower back porch repaired, hand rails, siding replaced on the left side of the building, mailbox.

Financially, I was not in a position to complete all the repairs on my home, maintain my family, pay property taxes, and re-inspection fees. I purchased my home in the inner city because this is where I grew up and I wanted to make difference in my community. I am a single mother of four children and grandmother of five children whom I help to support. I am the sole provider for my family and it has been a struggle caring for my children, grandchildren and taking care of all the bills to include rent, electric, water, school loans, car note, food, clothing, and unforeseen bills. Before my home was placarded, I paid my taxes in full yearly; this is reflected in past records. However, I am delinquent on the following property taxes:

2012 taxes are \$2668.10 with the City of Milwaukee and approximately \$3760.42 with Kohn Law Firm.

2013 taxes are \$5769.83 with the City of Milwaukee and approximately \$6635.31 with Kohn Law Firm.

2014 tax bill is \$6, 631.61, (\$4,258.80 BLDG Re-inspection fees and \$1,115.40 DNS fees, and \$436.55 DELQ City Services). This bill is not with Kohn Law Firm.

The special enforced fees accumulated as a result of DNS not working with me, not giving me credit for the work that was completed during the **ACTIVE REHABILITATION** process or maintaining contact with them regarding the progress.

To speak to this epidemic, families as a whole as being penalized, causing homeless, have lack of basic needs met, and a peace of mind. When a property has been placarded; the DNS automatically places you in a home abatement program to re-inspect your home for incomplete code violations and if the violation are not completed when they come out they will automatically impose a special assessment fee/re-inspection fee up to \$354.90/monthly until all code violation are closed.

Not to mention that there is no continuity of services; there were multiple departments coming out to my home for one inspector to another. Each inspector represented the DNS; therefore it was not clear to me who or what the expectations were. For example, a young lady came out to my home stating she was with DNS and she needed to inspect the inside of my home and after gaining access; she indicated work was being completing and there was no need for fees to continue to be enforced; however, the fees kept incurring. The DNS should have a sit down process, indicating all departments involved in the process to give you a clear and concise understanding of how it all works. Had this process been administered properly, my property taxes would not have gone to this extremity. This is an **economic disparity** that is destroying impoverished communities be it intentionally or unintentionally. When you have to make a decision between paying your property taxes and meeting the needs of your family, you will take care of your family first.

I feel that it is unethical, unfair, and inappropriate for the DNS to act in this manner. During an **ACTIVE REHABILITATION**, I should have been **Exempt** from these fees. These re-inspections fees were imposed onto my tax bill causing it to be extremely difficult for me to pay my real property taxes, garnishment of my wages, and lack of support to my family.

My wages are currently being garnished by Kohn Law Firm presently for 2012 taxes in the amount of \$600 per month. I feel my rights as a consumer has been violated due to Kohn Law Firm aggressively garnishing my wages after offering to pay \$200 per pay period.

A supportive program such as a **Compliance Loan Program** should be offered to home owners who are affected by the placard that would be a guide into the right direction so that each person has a clear understanding of what they should be doing. The program should offer help to home owners succeed in finding trustworthy contractors to do the work or the work can be done and added on to the tax bill. The program should offer a plan to have repairs completed in a timely fashion with the support of the Neighborhood Improvement Program/s to help to support less homelessness, poverty, depression/oppression and to prevent home foreclosures.

I am requesting a reevaluation of this situation to resolve the issue around my tax obligation such as removing the incurred special assessments fees that has been imposed on my tax bills preventing me from being able to be current on my property taxes. I would also like to be put a payment plan to get my delinquent taxes paid in a way that it is conducive to my financial ability.

If you have any further questions, please feel free to give me a call at 731-518-7726.

Sincerely,

Vanessa Reece