



**BALTIMORE CITY COUNCIL  
PUBLIC SAFETY AND  
GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS  
COMMITTEE**

**Mission Statement**

*On behalf of the Citizens of Baltimore City, the Public Safety and Government Operations will be responsible for matters concerning public safety, including, but not limited to; emergency preparedness, police services, fire/EMS, and the executive, administrative, and operational functions of the city government and libraries.*

**The Honorable Mark Conway  
Chairman**

**PUBLIC HEARING**

**Wednesday, July 7, 2021  
1:00 PM**

**Council Bill: 21-0017R  
Investigative Hearing –  
Arson and Fire Fatality Awareness  
- Reinstating the Baltimore City  
- Joint Arson Awareness Task Force**

# CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEES

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Eric Costello  
Sharon Green Middleton  
Odette Ramos  
James Torrence  
*Staff: Richard Krummerich*



**BILL SYNOPSIS**

**Committee: Public Safety and Government Operations**

**Bill 21-0017R**

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**Investigative Hearing – Arson and Fire Fatality Awareness:  
 Re-Instituting the Baltimore City Joint Agency Arson Task Force**

**Sponsor:** Councilmember Burnett

**Introduced:** February 8, 2021

**Purpose:**

For the purpose of inviting representatives from the Baltimore City Fire Department, the Baltimore Police Department, the Office of the State’s Attorney for Baltimore City, the Baltimore City Health Department, the Baltimore City Department of Housing and Community Development, the Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice, the Baltimore City Public School System, and the Mayor’s Office of Homeless Services to appear before the City Council to discuss arsons, fire fatalities and injuries, and school fires; how we can work to re-institute the Joint Agency Arson Task Force; and discuss other tools that would assist in the prevention or prosecution of arson.

**Effective:** None

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**Agency Reports**

Law Department	
Department of Finance	
Police Department	
State’s Attorney’s Office	
Health Department	
Dept. of Housing and Community Development	
Mayor’s Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement	
Baltimore City Public School System	
Mayor’s Office of Human Services	

## Analysis

### Background

In 2002, the Baltimore City Fire Department responded to over 2,750 structure fires, many of which involved vacant homes in various neighborhoods throughout Baltimore. As a result of the alarming number of fires in several different neighborhoods, the fire department heightened fire prevention and arson awareness through a task force of city agencies. Those agencies included the Baltimore City Fire Department's Office of the Fire Marshal, the Baltimore Police Arson unit, the Office of the State Fire Marshal, the Mayor's Office of Neighborhoods, the Department of Housing and Community Development, the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice, Baltimore City School Police, and the Office of the State's Attorney.

In 2017, Scripps Howard News Service conducted a yearlong investigation and found that just 5% of all residential building fires were intentionally set, according to the National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS), the world's largest, national database of annual fire incident information and part of the Department of Homeland Security. But arson is actually more common than it is reported by the United States government. Bill Degnan, New Hampshire's Fire Marshal and President of the National Association of State Fire Marshals stated, "Arson is grossly underreported... I believe the rate of arson in America is somewhere between 40 percent and 50 percent, in that range."

The quality of the federal data is haphazard and the underreporting of arson could have serious consequences:

- Cities and towns are not focusing enough of America's 1.1 million firefighters to combat arson;
- Up to half of the estimated 3,000 fire deaths each year should be treated as homicides;
- Arsonists may remain at large, free to burn; and
- Much of the nearly \$15.5 billion paid each year by insurance companies (and their clients) should be contested since arson often involves fraud.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Reporting database defines arson as any willful or malicious burning or attempt to burn, with or without intent to defraud. Compared to other municipalities in Maryland, Baltimore City has led them all with the highest number of arsons in the state. **Listed below are the arson totals as of the last time the fire department presented this data in February of 2019:**

Calendar Year	Number of Arsons
2010	340
2011	299
2012	242
2013	278
2014	216
2015	287
2016	266
2017	282
2018	51 (as of May)

## Senior Population Fire Related Deaths

In 1938, the Baltimore City Fire Department started keeping a record of fire fatalities in the City of Baltimore. Since then hundreds of people have died as a result of fire related causes. In 1994, after experiencing a fire on Hollins Street that claimed the lives of nine people, then Fire Chief Herman Williams Junior introduced one of the most progressive internal fire safety strategies in modern history with the implementation of the department's free smoke detector program. Since then the members of the fire department have installed more than a quarter of a million free smoke detectors in homes around the city.

Those efforts have had a dramatic impact on preserving life and property in the city as the number of fire fatalities have dwindled from the mid-forties and high-thirties during the 1990's, to the numbers we see today which fluctuate between the high-teens and the low-twenties.

A comprehensive analysis was conducted of the fire fatalities that occurred from 2010 through 2018. The data shows that during this timeframe the city has lost 160 of its residents as a result of fire related incidents. Of those 160 deaths, 57% (90 people) of all fire related fatalities were people classified as members of the Silent Generation (1925 – 1945) or the Baby Boomers generation (1946 – 1964). Further analysis of these statistics highlighted that 66.3% of those fatalities happened from 9pm – 9am, while the remaining 33.7% died between 9am – 9pm. A study conducted by Johns Hopkins University showed that one in three people over the age of 60, fully half of those over 75, and ninety percent of people over 80 have difficulty with or cannot hear the high-frequency sound notifications that standard household smoke alarms produce. This research could help with understanding why smoke alarms play a limited role in helping to save the lives of elderly residents.

Year	Baby Boomers	Silent Generation	Total Year Death Toll	Percentage of Baby Boomer and Veterans
2018	2	4	10	60%
2017	11	5	30	53%
2016	5	3	16	50%
2015	10	1	18	61%
2014	6	2	18	44%
2013	10	6	20	80%
2012	3	3	12	50%
2011	5	7	17	70%
2010	4	5	20	45%
<b>Total</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>57%</b>

These statistics could prove to be problematic in the future because according to a report done by the Pew Research Center, starting on January 1, 2011 and every day for the next 19 years 10,000 baby boomers will reach age 65. In Baltimore City there is an estimated population of 614,000 people. The Silent generation and Baby Boomers account for 137,028 or 22% of the total population.

## Youth and Young Adults

An analysis was also conducted on the effects of fire related incidents on the youth and young adult population of the city. Data collected and analyzed in this category focused on fire related deaths, and intentionally set school fires by children in the Baltimore City Public School System.

Nationwide, children of all ages set over 100,000 fires annually. Approximately 25,000 of those fires occur in the homes, and children account for 20 to 25% of all fire deaths. In Baltimore City, children born between 1997 and 2018 represent the second largest group of citizens to die in home fires (37), that number is consistent with the national average accounting for 23.5% of all fire fatalities.

There were 138 public school fires in Baltimore's 2003 – 2004 academic year. By 2008, there were nearly 500 more. That translates to an estimated 56,160 hours of instructional time lost between 2004 and 2008. In the 2012 – 2013 academic school year the fire department in partnership with the Baltimore City Public School System was able to get school fires down to a record low of 12. Since then the city has seen those number start to increase again:

School Year	Number of School Fires
2007 – 2008	158
2008 – 2009	93
2009 – 2010	61
2010 – 2011	48
2011 – 2012	22
2012 – 2013	12
2013 – 2014	38
2014 – 2015	50
2015 – 2016	38
2016 – 2017	41

During the 2017 – 2018 academic school year, The Baltimore Sun ran a series of stories that revealed that in previous school years the Baltimore City Public Schools System did not conduct the minimum number of state-mandated fire drills. The state code requires that schools that are fully protected by an automatic sprinkler system to hold five fire drills each school year, while schools without such systems must run eight drills.

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### Additional Information

**Fiscal Note:** Not Available

**Information Source(s):** Agency Reports; The Baltimore Sun; America Burning – The Report of the National Commission on Fire Prevention and Control; ABC Action News – Arson in America: What's the Alarming Reality?; U.S. Fire Administration: Community Arson Prevention

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Analysis by: Samuel Johnson, Jr.  
Analysis Date: July 7, 2021

Direct Inquiries to: (410) 396-1091

**CITY OF BALTIMORE**  
**COUNCIL BILL 21-0017R**  
**(First Reader)**

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Introduced by: Councilmember Burnett, Porter, Middleton, Bullock, Cohen, Stokes

Introduced and read first time: February 8, 2021

Assigned to: Public Safety and Government Operations

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REFERRED TO THE FOLLOWING AGENCIES: Fire Department, Police Department, State's Attorney, Department of Health, Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice, Baltimore City Public School System, Mayor's Office of Homeless Services, City Solicitor, Department of Housing and Community Development, Department of Finance, Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement

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A RESOLUTION ENTITLED

1 A COUNCIL RESOLUTION concerning

2 **Investigative Hearing – Arson and Fire Fatality Awareness:**  
3 **Re-instituting the Baltimore City Joint Agency Arson Task Force**

4 FOR the purpose of inviting representatives from the Baltimore City Fire Department, the  
5 Baltimore Police Department, the Office of the State's Attorney for Baltimore City, the  
6 Baltimore City Health Department, the Baltimore City Department of Housing and  
7 Community Development, the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice, the Baltimore City Public  
8 School System, and the Mayor's Office of Homeless Services to appear before the City  
9 Council to discuss arsons, fire fatalities and injuries, and school fires; how we can work to  
10 re-institute the Joint Agency Arson Task Force; and discuss other tools that would assist in  
11 the prevention or prosecution of arson.

12 **Recitals**

13 Baltimore City ended 2020 with 7 fire fatalities, the lowest number of fire related deaths in  
14 the history of the Baltimore City Fire Department. Despite this historic milestone, the Baltimore  
15 City Fire Department closed out the decade with over 2,400 cases of arson, 185 fire fatalities, and  
16 250 school fires. By any measure, Baltimore City has a fire problem.

17 Arsons endanger the lives of citizens, who are often innocent bystanders of these acts, and  
18 Fire Department personnel who are called on to respond to these incidents. Arson destroys more  
19 than buildings; it can devastate a community resulting in the decline of economic development,  
20 increased insurance premiums, financial hardships for people already living on fixed incomes,  
21 loss of business revenue, and a decrease in property values. Some of the reasons why people  
22 commit arson are to conceal other violent crimes, fraud, vandalism, and pyromania.

23 Acknowledging the catastrophic toll that arson takes on the wellbeing of our communities,  
24 the City Council would like a briefing on what systems are in place to ensure that there is a  
25 coordinated investigation between the Baltimore City Fire Department, the Baltimore Police  
26 Department, and the Office of the State's Attorney. Moreover, the discussion should include a  
27 frank assessment of the Baltimore City Fire Department's and Baltimore Police Department's  
28 arson units staffing and average caseload per investigator and whether we have the correct  
29 number of personnel assigned to keep pace with the high number of arson investigations that

EXPLANATION: CAPITALS indicate matter added to existing law.  
[Brackets] indicate matter deleted from existing law.

**Council Bill 21-0017R**

1 occur in the City. Finally, the Fire Department should be prepared to brief the Council on  
2 detailed statistical data on the total number of arsons that have occurred in each of the last five  
3 years, segmented by what property set on fire, and what the clearance rate was for that crime each  
4 year.

5 Using this information, we as a City government can begin the process of developing  
6 a coordinated plan to implement proven policies such as a Joint Agency Arson Task Force or a  
7 Community Arson Watch Program that would lead to significant declines and arson across the  
8 City.

9 **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF BALTIMORE,** That the  
10 Council invites representatives from the Baltimore City Fire Department, the Baltimore Police  
11 Department, the Office of the State’s Attorney for Baltimore City, the Baltimore City Health  
12 Department, the Baltimore City Department of Housing and Community Development, the  
13 Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice, the Baltimore City Public School System, and the Mayor’s  
14 Office of Homeless Services to appear before the City Council to discuss arsons, fire fatalities  
15 and injuries, and school fires; how we can work to re-institute the Joint Agency Arson Task  
16 Force; and discuss other policies that would assist in the prevention or prosecution of arson.

17 **AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED,** That a copy of this Resolution be sent to the Mayor, the  
18 Chief of the Baltimore City Fire Department, the Baltimore City Police Commissioner, the  
19 State’s Attorney for Baltimore City, the Commissioner of the Baltimore City Health Department,  
20 the Commissioner of the Baltimore City Department of Housing and Community Development,  
21 the Director of the Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice, the Chief Executive Office of the  
22 Baltimore City Public School System, the Director of the Mayor’s Office of Homeless Services,  
23 and the Mayor's Legislative Liaison to the City Council.



**PUBLIC SAFETY AND  
GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS  
COMMITTEE**

**AGENCY REPORTS**

February 17, 2021

The Honorable President and Members  
of the Baltimore City Council  
Attn: Executive Secretary  
Room 409, City Hall  
100 N. Holliday Street  
Baltimore, Maryland 21202

Re: City Council Bill 21-0017R – Investigative Hearing – Arson and Fire  
Fatality Awareness: Re-instituting the Baltimore City Joint Agency Task  
Force

Dear President and City Council Members:

The Law Department has reviewed City Council Bill 21-0017R for form and legal sufficiency. This resolution is for the purpose of inviting representatives from the Baltimore City Fire Department, the Baltimore Police Department, the Office of the State's Attorney for Baltimore City, the Baltimore City Health Department, the Baltimore City Department of Housing and Community Development, the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice, the Baltimore City Public School System, and the Mayor's Office of Homeless Services to appear before the City Council to discuss arsons, fire fatalities and injuries, and school fires; how we can work to re-institute the Joint Agency Arson Task Force; and discuss other tools that would assist in the prevention or prosecution of arson.

A resolution is an appropriate way for the City Council of Baltimore to conduct an investigative hearing. *See, e.g., Inlet Assocs. v. Assateague House Condominium*, 313 Md. 413, 428 (1988). Therefore, the Law Department approves this Resolution for form and legal sufficiency.

Very truly yours,



Hilary Ruley  
Chief Solicitor

cc: Matthew Stegman  
Nina Themelis  
Nikki Thompson  
Elena DiPietro  
Victor Terval  
Ashlea Brown

# BALTIMORE CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

**Brandon M. Scott**  
*Mayor, City of Baltimore*

**Linda Chinnia**  
*Chair, Baltimore City Board  
of School Commissioners*

**Dr. Sonja Brookins Santelises**  
*Chief Executive Officer*

## **City Council Resolution 21-0017R Investigative Hearing - Arson and Fire Fatality Awareness: Re-instituting the Baltimore City Joint Agency Arson Task Force**

July 7, 2021

Baltimore City Public Schools (City Schools) supports Council Resolution 21-0017R, which seeks to examine the cause and potential prevention of arsons, fire fatalities and injuries, and school fires, as well as to determine possibilities for reinstating the Joint Agency Arson Task Force.

City Schools takes fire prevention seriously, as the safety and well-being of City Schools students and staff continues to be our top priority. We remain committed to ensuring all our students feel connected to school learning environments that are safe and supportive and facilitate their ability to actively engage, thrive, and fulfil their tremendous potential. As such, we welcome the opportunity to collaborate with the Baltimore City Fire Department and our sister agencies in order to explore the most appropriate and effective next steps for reducing fire risk.

By way of background, during the 2007/08 school year, the Baltimore City Fire Department recorded 153 fires in Baltimore City Public schools. On August 1, 2008 The School Fire Reduction Program was created and two detectives from City Schools Police were assigned to work with the Baltimore City Fire Department's Fire Investigation Bureau (FIB) and the Baltimore City Police's Arson Unit. As noted below, we experienced a steady reduction in the number of school fires during this time:

<b>School Year</b>	<b>Number of Fires</b>
2009/09	93
2009/10	61
2010/11	48
2011/12	22
2012/13	11

The Task Force was ultimately dissolved after a reduction of 92.8%. Some of the students identified during investigations were referred to the BCFD Fire Setters Intervention Program as a diversion program as an alternative to criminal prosecution.

Our efforts to further reduce the risk of fires in our schools are most evident in the data reflected below from the past five years.

**Baltimore City School Police Force  
Recorded Fires**

<b>Years</b>	<b>Building</b>	<b>Dumpster</b>	<b>Playground</b>	<b>Vehicle</b>	<b>Pulled Station</b>	<b>Accidental</b>	<b># of Fires</b>
<b>2016</b>	27	4	5	0	6	3	45
<b>2017</b>	36	4	4	1	6	10	61
<b>2018</b>	5	3	3	0	3	5	19
<b>2019</b>	17	2	5	1	2	1	28
<b>2020</b>	6	0	3	1	6	3	19

In closing, we appreciate the Baltimore City Council’s attention to Council Resolution 21-0017R and look forward to participating in further discussions regarding the potential reestablishment of the Joint Agency Arson Task Force.



## MEMORANDUM

To: The Honorable President and Members of the Baltimore City Council  
c/o Natawna Austin, Executive Secretary

From: Alice Kennedy, Acting Housing Commissioner 

Date: April 20, 2021

**Re: City Council Resolution 21-0017R Investigative Hearing - Arson and Fire Fatality Awareness: Re-instituting the Baltimore City Joint Agency Arson Task Force**

The Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) has reviewed City Council Resolution 21-0017R for the purpose of inviting representatives from the Baltimore City Fire Department, the Baltimore Police Department, the Office of the State's Attorney for Baltimore City, the Baltimore City Health Department, the Baltimore City Department of Housing and Community Development, the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice, the Baltimore City Public School System, and the Mayor's Office of Homeless Services to appear before the City Council to discuss arsons, fire fatalities and injuries, and school fires; how we can work to re-institute the Joint Agency Arson Task Force; and discuss other tools that would assist in the prevention or prosecution of arson.

DHCD takes several measures to improve fire safety throughout the City. DHCD's Code Enforcement and Inspections unit works to enforce the Building, Fire and Related Codes and the International Property Maintenance Code by issuing notices and citations for interior and exterior sanitation and safety issues, which left unabated, could lead to the increased risk of fire. Code Enforcement Inspectors perform inspections for possible violations at the request of owners, neighbors and tenants in addition to requests generated through the 311 system and pro-active inspections. The inspections team also gets referrals from other City agencies, such as Police and the Health Department, to investigate potential issues that are brought to their attention such as cases of hoarding, vacant buildings inhabited by squatters and accumulation of hazardous trash and debris. Vacant buildings are particularly vulnerable to fire and arson and DHCD works closely with the Baltimore City Department of Public works to quickly identify and board buildings that are open to casual entry. Inspectors can issue emergency notices for code enforcement violations which require that the issue be corrected within a certain timeframe. Depending on the type of violations that are identified it could result in the property being vacated until the violations are corrected.

DHCD's Office of Permits and Plans Review ensures that new construction and rehabilitation work is properly planned to meet all Building, Fire and Related Codes and that the proper reviews are conducted by the Baltimore City Fire Department (BCFD) prior to any permits being issued. The reviews include compliance with safety requirements such as; sprinkler systems,



smoke detectors, fire alarms, clear exit paths, proper signage and the use of fire-retardant construction materials.


DHCD's Rental Inspections Program adds inspection and rental licensing requirements for all non-owner occupied single-family dwellings. This inspection requirement adds an additional layer of protection for tenants. Fire related items required in the inspection include that electrical live wires are not visible in living areas, electrical outlets are protected by cover plates, electrical outlets in areas where water is generally present are Ground Fault Interrupter protected, lighting fixtures are functional; and switches protected by cover plates and smoke detectors are properly installed and operational. These inspections could reduce the number of fire related deaths due to electrical issues or lack of smoke detectors.

The Baltimore City Fire Department (BCFD) previously established a Joint Agency Arson Task Force which included various agencies committed to combating the root causes of fires. DHCD is committed to supporting the work of BCFD and sister agencies to re-institute the Task Force and discuss other policies that would assist in the prevention or prosecution of arson.

DHCD **supports** the passage of City Council Resolution 21-0017R.

AK/sm

cc: Ms. Themelis, Nina, *Mayor's Office of Government Relations*

F R O M	Name & Title	Dr. Letitia Dzirasa, Commissioner	Health Department  AGENCY REPORT	
	Agency Name & Address	Health Department 1001 E. Fayette Street Baltimore, Maryland 21201		
	Subject/ Position:	21-0017R – Investigative Hearing – Arson and Fire Fatality Awareness: Re-instituting the Baltimore City Joint Agency Arson Task Force <b>FAVORABLE</b>		

To: President and Members  
of the City Council  
c/o 409 City Hall

July 7, 2021

The Baltimore City Health Department (BCHD) is pleased to have the opportunity to review Council Bill #21-0017R, entitled, “Investigative Hearing – Arson and Fire Fatality Awareness: Re-instituting the Baltimore City Joint Agency Arson Task Force.” This resolution seeks a discussion on “how we can work to re-institute the Joint Agency Arson Task Force... and other tools that would assist in the prevention or prosecution of arson.”

Understanding that public safety is a social determinant of health linked to both exposure to violence and economic opportunity, BCHD welcomes a discussion on arson prevention and urges a **favorable** report for Council Bill #21-0017R.



July 6, 2021

Honorable President and Members of the Baltimore City Council  
City Hall, Room 400  
100 N. Holliday Street  
Baltimore, Maryland 21202

**RE: City Council Bill 21-0017R Investigative Hearing – Arson and Fire Fatality Awareness: Re-instituting the Baltimore City Joint Agency Arson Task Force**

Dear Council President Mosby and Members of the City Council:

The Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement (MONSE) has reviewed City Council Bill Resolution 21-0017R, which seeks to invite agency leaders to discuss arsons, fire fatalities and injuries, and re-instituting the Joint Agency Arson Task Force.

**Agency Position: No Position**

MONSE does not have a position on this resolution. MONSE will defer to the Baltimore City Fire Department, Baltimore Police Department, and other agency partners for the best way to respond to this concerning increase in arsons and fire injuries. MONSE is willing to provide inter-agency coordination support to help advance a collaborative response to this public safety threat.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "S Jackson". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Shantay A. Jackson  
Director, Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement

cc: Sunny Schnitzer, Deputy Mayor, Public Safety  
Nina Themelis, Legislative Liaison, Mayor's Office of Government Relations  
Natasha Mehu, Director, Mayor's Office of Government Relations