

**CITY OF BALTIMORE  
COUNCIL BILL 11-0323R  
(Resolution)**

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Introduced by: President Young, Councilmembers Conaway, Henry, Middleton, D'Adamo,  
Branch, Kraft, Clarke, Reisinger, Curran, Welch

Introduced and read first time: September 26, 2011

Assigned to: Judiciary and Legislative Investigations Committee

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REFERRED TO THE FOLLOWING AGENCIES: Police Commissioner, Fire Department, Department of  
Housing and Community Development, Department of Finance

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A RESOLUTION ENTITLED

1 A COUNCIL RESOLUTION concerning

2 **Investigative Hearing – Baltimore City False Alarm Reduction Program**

3 FOR the purpose of requesting the Police Commissioner, the Fire Chief, the Housing  
4 Commissioner, and the Director of Finance to assist the City Council in exploring the  
5 efficacy of the City's False Alarm Reduction Program in reducing the number and frequency  
6 of false alarms; in determining the number and monetary value of false alarm occurrence fees  
7 collected in the most recently completed collection period; in examining program  
8 administrators' responses to citizens' requests for information or assistance; and in assessing  
9 the legitimacy of permitting liens to be placed against residential properties for non- or late-  
10 payment of occurrence fees.

11 **Recitals**

12 *City of Baltimore False Alarm Reduction Program*: False Alarms Activations  
13 are a major public safety concern. The Baltimore City Police Department  
14 responded to more than 125,000 alarms in 2002. Ninety-eight percent of these  
15 alarms calls were false. False alarm activations require an enormous resource  
16 commitment by the police annually. False alarms are costly and dangerous  
17 because they divert police officers from true crime prevention and delay response  
18 to real emergencies.

19 The False Alarm Reduction program was established to register all burglar alarm systems in  
20 the City, track the occurrence of alarms, and administer a tiered system of false alarm occurrence  
21 fines that is be imposed on residents and businesses experiencing excessive false alarms.  
22 Baltimore Police officials hope that no one experiences a false alarm and provide 2 "free"  
23 responses to false activations in a 365-day period.

24 A false alarm is defined as any alarm signal that elicits a response by police personnel and  
25 for which there is no evidence of criminal activity to justify a police response. Simply put, if a  
26 police officer responds to an alarm signal and, after investigation, finds no evidence that criminal  
27 activity occurred or was occurring, the call will be designated a false alarm. Most false alarms  
28 are caused either by human error or equipment malfunction.

EXPLANATION: Underlining indicates matter added by amendment.  
~~Strike out~~ indicates matter deleted by amendment.

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1 Beginning with the third and subsequent responses, users will be assessed a false alarm  
2 occurrence fee as follows:

3	3 <sup>rd</sup>	\$ 50	11 <sup>th</sup>	\$ 600
4	4 <sup>th</sup>	\$100	12 <sup>th</sup> Residential	\$ 700
5	5 <sup>th</sup>	\$150	Commercial	\$2,000
6	6 <sup>th</sup>	\$200	13 <sup>th</sup> Residential	\$ 800
7	7 <sup>th</sup>	\$250	Commercial	\$2,000
8	8 <sup>th</sup>	\$300	14 <sup>th</sup> and above	
9	9 <sup>th</sup>	\$400	Residential	\$1,000
10	10 <sup>th</sup>	\$500	Business	\$2,000

11 If the occurrence fee is not paid, a City lien, which is a charge upon the owner’s real property  
12 for the satisfaction of debt arising by statute, can be placed against the residential or commercial  
13 property. Ultimately if the debt is not satisfied, the property is subject to the tax sale process.  
14 Additionally, failure to register an alarm may result in the issuance of environmental citations.  
15 Last year the City auctioned 12,689 homes and properties whose owners failed to pay local taxes  
16 and municipal bills, including false alarm fees – twice as many as in 2006, in the midst of  
17 Baltimore’s housing boom. This year 10,839 properties were offered at tax sale. The increase in  
18 the last two years in properties being offered at tax sale reflects the downturn in the economy  
19 and the dire straights in which many Baltimore City residents find themselves.

20 While it is imperative that the City collect money owed, it is also important to ensure that  
21 Baltimore City property owners are treated fairly and compassionately in these trying times.

22 **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF BALTIMORE,** That this  
23 Body hereby requests the Police Commissioner, the Fire Chief, the Housing Commissioner, and  
24 the Director of Finance to assist in exploring the efficacy of the City’s False Alarm Reduction  
25 Program in reducing the number and frequency of false alarms; in determining the number and  
26 monetary value of false alarm occurrence fees collected in the most recently completed  
27 collection period; in examining program administrators’ responses to citizens’ requests for  
28 information or assistance; and in assessing the legitimacy of permitting liens to be placed against  
29 residential properties for non- or late- payment of occurrence fees.

30 **AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED,** That a copy of this Resolution be sent to the Mayor, the  
31 Police Commissioner, the Fire Chief, the Housing Commissioner, the Director of Finance, and  
32 the Mayor’s Legislative Liaison to the City Council.