

NATAWNA R



# BALTIMORE POLICE DEPARTMENT

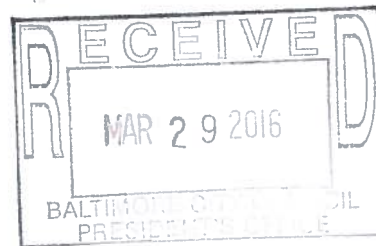


**Stephanie Rawlings-Blake**  
Mayor

**Kevin Davis**  
Police Commissioner

March 30, 2016

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



**Attention: Natawna Austin, Executive Secretary**

**Re: City Council Bill No. 16-0616**  
**Hookah Lounges**

Dear Council President Young and Members of the City Council:

The Baltimore Police Department (BPD or the Department) has reviewed Council Bill 16-0616. This legislation generally provides an authorizing framework for hookah lounges in certain areas of Baltimore City. The bill exempts hookah lounges from the definition of an after-hours establishment, exempts hookah lounges from the City's indoor smoking restrictions, and exempts hookah lounges from having to obtain a late-night operations licenses. The Department is opposed to this bill.

While the Department does not oppose authorizing the presence of hookah lounges in Baltimore City, the Department opposes Council Bill 16-0616 as drafted. There are a number of establishments operating as hookah lounges in Baltimore City currently, even though they are not licensed to do so. In addition to operating illegally as a hookah lounge, many of these establishments have other issues associated with them that are detracting from the surrounding communities. Issues range from failure to observe proper hours, failure to observe liquor laws, illegal narcotics, exceeding maximum capacity, exceeding noise levels, and other nuisances. Oftentimes, these establishments are occupied by several hundred people at a time in buildings with maximum occupancies that are much lower. When these hookah lounges close as late as 4:00am or 4:30am, large crowds, often intoxicated, spill out onto streets and create a disorderly environment. Police have responded to large-scale fights at these establishments, and at least two homicides have occurred in the last several years where the involved individuals had been at hookah lounges after-hours. Particularly in the Central District, where a majority of the hookah lounges are located, a significant amount of police resources have been required to respond to calls for service in and around hookah lounges. With certain establishments, police resources are needed to deal with these issues every weekend. Such a drain on resources hampers the Department's ability to fight crime in other areas.

Given the challenges the City has faced with such establishments, any legislation to authorize the operation of hookah lounges must contain proper safeguards to ensure the safety and security of patrons and the surrounding communities. For example, under the current bill, hookah lounges are exempted from obtaining approval to operate after-hours. The Department does not believe a blanket exception for hookah lounges is appropriate. The bill does little to regulate the public safety challenges described above. Therefore, as currently drafted, the Department opposes this legislation.

c/o 242 West 29<sup>th</sup> Street • Baltimore, Maryland 21211-2908

*opposes*

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. The Department looks forward to working with the City Council on this matter.

Sincerely,



Andrew G. Vetter  
Director of Government Affairs