



BALTIMORE POLICE DEPARTMENT



Brandon M. Scott
Mayor

Michael S. Harrison
Police Commissioner

June 30, 2021

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

RE: City Council Bill #21-0041R
Informational Hearing: Domestic Violence in Baltimore City

Dear Council President Mosby and Members of the City Council:

The Baltimore Police Department (BPD) has reviewed Council Bill 21-0041R for the purpose of inviting representatives from the Baltimore City State's Attorney's Office, the Baltimore Police Department, the Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement, the Health Department, the Sheriff's Office, as well as community advocates fighting against domestic violence to share their expertise with the Baltimore City Council and the general public and to discuss programs available to victims of domestic violence.

Thank you so much for allowing BPD to respond to this resolution. The Department takes domestic violence seriously and we recognize that the community is impacted significantly when domestic violence occurs. To ensure that these crimes are addressed swiftly and with the seriousness they deserve, BPD has developed a comprehensive approach toward investigating these crimes and supporting victims. Within the body of this letter, we will provide some brief insight into how the Department addresses domestic violence and we look forward to providing more details during the hearing.

Within the Special Investigations Unit there has been a unit established that is tasked with addressing the most heinous of crimes that can occur in a household: the Family Crimes Unit. This unit takes a victim centered and trauma informed approach that ensures that all officers and detectives conduct comprehensive investigations and display the utmost regard for the victim's physical and emotional well-being. We understand that a consistent response will also improve the public's perception of BPD as a thorough, caring and skilled department which further increases BPD legitimacy in the eyes of the community and the victims.

Family Crimes Unit

The policy of the Baltimore Police Department Family Crimes Unit is to vigorously investigate domestic violence incidents, to seek protection for the victim, offer advocacy services, censure the criminal behavior and deter further violence. To meet these goals, the Unit will initiate investigations in a non-traditional manner to locate and identify households where domestic violence may be occurring. This is accomplished through:

- Review of certain categories of calls for service
- Review of incident reports
- Referrals from community associations, victim advocates, other government agencies

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A domestic violence incident is defined as any violent acts between current or former intimate partner relationships between husband/wife, boyfriend/girlfriend and LGBTQ partners. In order to accurately identify and track domestic incidents, a computerized victim/assailant database has been established and is maintained to include the following information: central complaint numbers, crime/incident descriptions, date/location of the occurrence, relationship between the victim and abuser, victim's name, suspect's name and arrest information.

Recognizing that victims of domestic violence are frequently unwilling to testify against their abuser, cases are prepared so as to enable the State's Attorney's Office to proceed with or without the victim's testimony. To that end, investigation files include the following information:

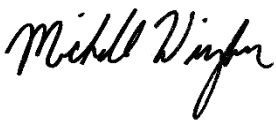
- Prior incidents
- Photographs of visible injuries
- Identification of witnesses
- Medical records
- 911 audio
- Documentation of "excited utterances"
- Video-taped statements from the victim
- Positive identification of suspects
- Weapons retrieved

To further support the victim, BPD Victim Advocates provide the following services:

- Provides crisis counseling
- Helps victims with obtaining Protective Orders by assisting with paperwork and accompanying victims to court throughout the entire process
- Accompanies detectives to the homes of victims to assist with follow up and the offering of services
- Helps the victim obtain emergency shelter and housing
- Transports victims to counseling sessions, social services and any other organization to assist the victim in becoming independent of their abuser
- Assists victims with signing up for VINE, Maryland Safe at Home address confidentiality program and the application for assistance from the Criminal Injury Compensation Board
- Provides each victim with a dangerousness/lethality assessment which was designed by nationally recognized expert, Jacqueline Campbell, PhD, of Johns Hopkins Hospital.

BPD fully supports City Council Resolution 21-0041R and looks forward to a robust discussion on this important issue. Thank you for allowing us to comment on this important piece of legislation.

Sincerely,



Michelle Wirzberger, Esq.
Director of Government Affairs

cc: Natwana Austin, Executive Secretary of the Baltimore City Council
Natasha Mehu, Director of Mayor's Office of Government Relations
Nina Themalis, Special Assistant and Legislative Liaison, MOGR
Eric Melancon, BPD Chief of Staff
Andrew Smullian, BPD Deputy Chief of Staff