

**CITY OF BALTIMORE
COUNCIL BILL 11-0325R
(Resolution)**

Introduced by: Councilmembers Conaway, Middleton, D'Adamo, Branch, Clarke, Kraft,
Reisinger, Curran, President Young, Councilmembers Holton, Henry, Welch, Spector
Introduced and adopted: October 17, 2011

A COUNCIL RESOLUTION CONCERNING

Request for State Action – Increased Penalties for Impersonating a Police Officer

FOR the purpose of respectfully requesting that the Honorable Chairs and Members of the Baltimore City Senate and House Delegations to the 2012 session of the Maryland General Assembly introduce and secure passage of state legislation to significantly increase the penalties for impersonating a police officer under Maryland law to more accurately reflect the harm that this crime does to community-police relations and more effectively deter criminals from furthering their crimes by impersonating police officers.

Recitals

Recently, a series of home invasion robberies by assailants claiming to be police officers has disturbed Baltimore. Several of these attacks, in which victims have been severely injured, may have been the work of a single gang, but there are also indications that some incidents may have been “copycat crimes” that have drawn inspiration from the success of the original attacks.

Crimes by police impersonators seem to be a reoccurring problem that crops up on a regular basis. However, any trend toward increased attacks and other crimes by police impersonators must be stopped in its tracks quickly in order to avoid a serious crisis of public trust towards the police departments. Baltimore police officers work hard on a daily basis to earn citizens’ trust, and they constantly put themselves at risk to assure the safety of those citizens. But every time a criminal passes himself off as a police officer, a dangerous element of mistrust is introduced into the relationship between officers and the public that undermines the ability of the police to do their jobs and increases the risks to both officers and the public at large.

Individuals are much less likely to approach or cooperate with officers if they have reason to fear that the police may instead be disguised criminals; and even the most innocent citizens may respond violently to police actions if they have reason to fear that a legitimate search or arrest is instead a disguised criminal assault. Crimes are less likely to be solved, and every interaction between officers and citizens can become fraught with dangerous tension that leads to avoidable and tragic clashes.

The damage that police impersonation can do to the relationship between police departments and the public makes it a very serious crime; and the advantages that it can offer to assailants makes it a tempting one. Yet impersonating a police officer is defined as a simple misdemeanor punishable by no more than 2 years’ imprisonment and a \$2,000 fine in §3-502 of the Maryland Public Safety Code. This classification and penalty neither capture the seriousness of this crime, nor threaten a steep enough penalty to serve as any kind of a deterrent to criminals already contemplating the commission of felonies with much harsher punishments.

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

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1 Significantly increasing the potential penalties attached to the crime of impersonating a
2 police officer could greatly assist in halting the attacks by fake officers. The potential harms that
3 these attacks can cause to our communities are certainly severe enough to warrant swift action
4 by the General Assembly before they grow into a problem that cannot be easily controlled.

5 **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF BALTIMORE,** That the
6 Honorable Chairs and Members of the Baltimore City Senate and House Delegations to the 2012
7 session of the Maryland General Assembly are respectfully requested to introduce and secure
8 passage of state legislation to significantly increase the penalties for impersonating a police
9 officer under Maryland law to more accurately reflect the harm that this crime does to
10 community-police relations and more effectively deter criminals from furthering their crimes by
11 impersonating police officers.

12 **AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED,** That a copy of this Resolution be sent to the Mayor, the
13 Honorable Chairs and Members of the Baltimore City Senate and House Delegations to the 2012
14 session of the Maryland General Assembly, the Police Commissioner, and the Mayor's
15 Legislative Liaison to the City Council.