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Name & Title	James W. Wallace, Fire Chief <i>JW</i>
Agency Name & Address	Baltimore City Fire Department 401 E. Fayette Street, Mezzanine
Subject	City Council Bill #22-0205 – Vacant Structures – Emergency Response Fee

CITY OF
BALTIMORE
MEMO



TO: The Honorable Nick J. Mosby, President
And All Members of the Baltimore City Council
City Hall, Room 408

DATE: March 11, 2024

The proposed legislation creates a new Subtitle to Article 9 of the City Code to establish a fee for services provided by the Baltimore City Fire Department (BCFD or the Department) at vacant structures.

On January 24, 2022, the BCFD lost three of its members (Lt. Paul Butrim, Lt. Kelsey Sadler and Firefighter Kenny Lacayo) in a tragic collapse of a vacant building. This legislation is a part of a package of bills introduced by the Baltimore City Council in an effort to provide solutions to the issue. Subsequent to the incident, the BCFD clarified some its policies related to vacant buildings and revised a program that would enable the Department to clearly identify vacant properties that are potentially dangerous for firefighters to enter (Code X). The Department has also implemented an effort with its sister agency, the Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD), to share information on the location and condition of vacant properties within the city.

The BCFD welcomes working with the Council on ways to mitigate the impact of vacant properties on our service, however, the creation of this new subtitle would create an administrative burden for the Department. Currently, the BCFD is understaffed and we have a structural resource deficit in the area of administration. There are currently no personnel available to examine the approximately 600+ incidents per day to identify which properties are vacant. The reporting system that BCFD uses, the National Fire Incident Reporting System, does not track whether a structure is occupied or vacant. Additionally, personnel resources are inadequate to create, send, and monitor invoices sent to the property owner. Should the Department get additional resources to address our administrative deficits, we would need them to go to mission critical areas in human resources, training, and information technology.

Additionally, it is very difficult to calculate the costs associated with an individual incident to determine a fee. Fire personnel are often working overtime and have varying degrees of seniority, which make determining a standardized fee per hour difficult to determine and fees must have a clear nexus to the service that is provided.

The Baltimore City Fire Department welcomes the opportunity to collaborate with the Baltimore City Council on ways to ameliorate the vacant property issue. However, the Department opposes CC 22 – 0205 as it would cause a serious administrative burden.

JW/kw