



BALTIMORE POLICE DEPARTMENT



Brandon M. Scott
Mayor

Michael S. Harrison
Police Commissioner

April 28, 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 #21-0050
Burglar Alarms Registration and Regulation – False Alarm

Dear Council President Mosby and Members of City Council:

The Baltimore Police Department (BPD) has reviewed Council Bill 21-0050 which is for the purpose of revising the fees assessed to alarm system users for repeated false alarms; altering the number of false alarms allowed within 12 months that will result in the placement of the premises into a no-response status; and requiring that alarm system monitors make certain additional attempts to verify the need for a police response.

Currently, the law requires that alarm system contractors, alarm system monitors and alarm system users must register and keep their registration current. It defines a *false alarm* as any alarm signal “1) that results in a police response to the user’s property and 2) for which no evidence is found, after reasonable investigation, of any criminal activity, property damage, or medical emergency that would justify a police response.” It also clarifies that a false alarm does not include the following: “1) an alarm signal that is cancelled by the monitor before a police officer arrives at the location; 2) a signal that occurs within 30 days of the original installation of the alarm system; or 3) an alarm signal from a medical alert device.”

The current law lays out the fines that are imposed if a property has more than one false alarm within a 12-month period. The fines range from \$50 for the 2nd and 3rd false alarms up to \$500 for 12 or more false alarms for residential users and \$2,000 for 15 or more false alarms for non-residential users. After the 10th false alarm, the alarm user must be sent a notice that indicates that after 5 more false alarms, the property will be placed on “no-response status.” What this means is that both residential and non-residential alarm users can have up to 15 false alarms in a 12-month period before the property can be placed into non-response status. It should also be noted that manual activation of an alarm system or a “panic” alarm that is activated by a user will always result in a BPD response regardless of a property being in “no response” status. This law only impacts automatic alarm activation for systems actively monitored by alarm companies.

A typical alarm signal response takes approximately 15-20 minutes of an officer's time. While that may not sound like much, consider that, in FY19, Baltimore police officers responded to a total of 18,214 alarm signals. Of that number, only 687 or 3.6% of the calls actually required a police response. The remainder were all false alarms. The chart below breaks down the number of unique locations and alarm activations that occurred in FY19:

Category	Unique Locations	Alarm Activations
1 Alarm	6,882	6,882
2 Alarms	1,895	3,790
3 Alarms	730	2,190
4 Alarms	336	1,344
5 - 14 Alarms	474	3,253
15 or More alarms	37	755
Total	10,354	18,214

City Council Bill 21-0050 seeks to encourage alarm system users to make changes to their behavior regarding management of their alarm systems to limit the amount of false alarm alerts which occupy our patrol officers' time. Properties would be placed on a no-response status if the property has had 5 or more false alarms in a 12-month period instead of 15 activations. Using the FY19 data as a reference, police would not be dispatched to 4,008 calls which diverted over 1,300 hours of patrol time per to non-emergencies.

The current standard of allowing up to 15 false alarms before a property can be placed in a no-response status wastes police resources and is ripe for modification. City Council Bill 21-0050 takes a fair and balanced approach toward encouraging users to take an active role in limiting reoccurring false alarms by providing early and frequent notice of the possibility that they may be placed on no-response status. The standard of 5 false alarm activations per year also places Baltimore City in line with other major cities in the country, and represents a better practice for false alarm programs. The current law also provides for reinstatement (or reactivation out of a no-response status) if the alarm system has been repaired, upgraded, or replaced and the cause of the false alarms corrected.

The BPD strongly supports City Council Bill 21-0050 and believes that it will help make residents safer by preventing a significant waste of police resources. Thank you for allowing us to comment on this 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
Brittany Lewis, Chief of Government Affairs, Office of the Council President
Eric Melancon, BPD Chief of Staff
Andrew Smullian, BPD Deputy Chief of Staff