



BALTIMORE POLICE DEPARTMENT



Brandon M. Scott
Mayor

Michael S. Harrison
Police Commissioner

November 17, 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 #21-0157
Limiting the Range of City-Owned Take-Home Vehicles

Dear Council President Mosby and Members of City Council:

The Baltimore Police Department (BPD) has reviewed Council Bill 21-0157 which is for the purpose of solely allowing a user of a City-owned take-home vehicle to drive the vehicle within the confines of Baltimore City; and authorizing City agencies to adopt implementing rules and regulations.

At the beginning of Police Commissioner Harrison's tenure with the BPD, he and his Executive Team pledged to cut out waste and fiscal mismanagement within the Department. They knew that they must be responsible and thoughtful about how they use the funds appropriated by the Mayor and City Council. As a result of that perspective, the Commissioner and his team took a number of unprecedented but vital steps toward reigning in spending and changing the culture at every level. One of the most prominent examples was our efforts to reduce overtime spending by adopting a series of good management practices and reforms.

Similarly, the Commissioner saw the previous practice of assigning take-home vehicles as wasteful. Accordingly, the Commissioner ordered a precise inventory of where every single take home vehicle was and identified who had been assigned the vehicle. He also established strict controls about who was to be eligible to utilize such a vehicle. Every individual who did not serve in an "on-call" position or who was not responsible for responding to crime scenes or emergencies outside of their normally scheduled work day, had to relinquish their vehicle.

Take home cars are currently assigned to a number of BPD employees of differing ranks, not as an extra benefit, but so that they can travel swiftly and safely from their home to crime scenes and other emergencies when called in to do so outside of their regular reporting hours. Included in this group are sworn members from units such as SWAT, Homicide, Executive Protection, K-9, Anti-Crime, Federal Task Forces, and Command Members.

The Executive Team has been working on additional reforms of the program and have developed a draft policy in which those who utilize a take home vehicle but reside outside of the city limits will have a bi-weekly sliding scale payroll deduction that is based on how far away they live from the Baltimore Police Department Headquarters. Under this process, we expect to recoup approximately \$300,000 annually which would cover much of costs associated with utilizing the vehicles outside of Baltimore City and would represent a very strategic way of meeting both the Department's operational needs and the City's desire to reduce unnecessary costs.

While the BPD understands the reasoning behind the introduction of this bill, we are especially concerned that the proposed restriction against allowing employees to travel outside of Baltimore City will negatively impact our ability to respond to emergencies in a timely manner. Moreover, the BPD strongly asserts that with the development of the policies and procedures discussed in this letter, the Department has demonstrated a strong commitment to fiscal responsibility and strategic asset management such that it should be permitted to assign take home vehicles to employees who must have such a vehicle to meet city-wide operational needs.

BPD opposes this legislation as drafted but we would support amendments that would codify the requirements included in our draft policy. Additionally, we would welcome the opportunity to work with the bill sponsor, the committee, the City Administrator and other agencies to strike the right balance for the residents of Baltimore.

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
Eric Melancon, BPD Chief of Staff
Andrew Smullian, BPD Deputy Chief of Staff