

# CITY OF BALTIMORE

BRANDON SCOTT – MAYOR

 ZEKE COHEN - COUNCIL PRESIDENT



OFFICE OF COUNCIL SERVICES

NANCY MEAD – DIRECTOR

100 N. HOLIDAY STREET

BALTIMORE MD, 21202

## HEARING NOTES

Bill: LO25-0020

Title: Informational Hearing Overtime and Vacancy Trends

Committee: Committee of the Whole

Chaired by: Zeke Cohen

Hearing Date: 5/22/2025

Time (Beginning): 9:30 AM

Time (Ending): 12:05 PM

Location: Du Burns Council Chamber / Webex

Total Attendance: Approximately 60 [in-person/virtual]

### Committee Members in Attendance:

Zeke Cohen

Zac Blanchard

Mark Conway

John Bullock

Antonio Glover

Ryan Dorsey

Paris Gray

Jermaine Jones

Danielle McCray

Isaac "Yitzy" Schleifer

Mark Parker

Phylicia Porter

Odette Ramos

Bill Synopsis in the file? ..... ☒ YES ☐ NO ☐ N/A

Attendance sheet in the file? ..... ☐ YES ☐ NO ☒ N/A

Agency reports read? ..... ☒ YES ☐ NO ☐ N/A

Hearing televised or audio-digitally recorded? ..... ☒ YES ☐ NO ☐ N/A

Certification of advertising/posting notices in the file? ..... ☐ YES ☐ NO ☐ N/A

Evidence of notification to property owners? ..... ☐ YES ☐ NO ☐ N/A

Final vote taken at this hearing? ..... ☐ YES ☐ NO ☐ N/A

Motioned by: .....

Seconded by: .....

Final Vote: .....

### Major Speakers

(This is not an attendance record.)

Laura Larsen, Budget Director (BBMR)  
 Tonya Brinkley, Interim Director (DHR)  
 Lindsay Wines, Assistance Deputy Director, Administration (DHR)  
 Nina Themelis, Director, Mayor's Office of Government Relations

---

### Major Issues Discussed

City Council President (CP) Zeke Cohen welcomed colleagues, members of the Administration, and attendees. CP introduced LO25-0020 Informational Hearing that examines overtime and vacancy trends across City agencies.

CP noted that the Council analyzed data (made available by the Administration) noting that the city has been budgeting for hundreds of positions that have been vacant for at least 18 months. CP labeled these as "phantom positions." In addition, CP states that overtime spending is still out of control in several agencies and each year Council is requested to pass large supplemental budgets to cover millions of dollars in expenses without prior Council approval. [See Visual graphics created to show overtime spending for CY 2023-2025 and total vacancies reported to the Administration in 2025 that describes the "phantom positions"].

Director Larsen presents PowerPoint to discuss data (organized by calendar year) regarding overtime usage and vacancies (pulling data from Workday between CY 2022-2025 – noting that both CY2022 and CY 2025 data is partial). [See PowerPoint]

- 95% of citywide overtime comes from 6 agencies (Police, Fire, Public Works, Transportation, General Services, and Rec & Park.
- 73% of citywide vacancies come from 5 agencies (Police, Public Works, Health, Transportation, and Fire)

Questions/Comments from Council	Responses
<p>Council President Cohen's:</p> <p>Analyzed overtime and vacancy data and found that as of May 2025 there are more than 500 positions within city agencies that report directly to the Administration that have been vacant for at least 18 months, and overall, that are more than 1500 vacant positions in city agencies funded by the general fund.</p> <p>Will that \$33 million be left in the general fund because we didn't pay the salaries for those positions?</p> <p>Is the expectation that long term vacant positions are used to cover OT?</p>	<p>Director Larsen:</p> <p>There are 554 general fund positions that have been vacant for more than 18 months, and 226 of those are within fire and police departments, primarily police officers and paramedics.</p> <p>Since 50% of those vacancies sit within police and fire most of the savings are being reallocated to cover the overtime costs since both of those departments did not decrease the level of service even with vacant positions. In these cases, vacancies increased during COVID. Changed recruitment efforts in Fire, and new focus on police hiring so seeing larger classes in police academy. One challenge remains is</p>

<p>How does the administration decide to redirect funds?</p>	<p>the length of time from training to deployment.</p> <p>We would not see savings for vacant positions unless there was a decrease in the services provided.</p> <p>The city's goal is staff service levels with regular time. However, some services are covered by OT (Sunday hours at libraries).</p> <p>The agency expenditures are monitored on a quarterly basis by BBMR and flag for the Administration and Council which agencies are over spending. Different strategies are put in place to control spending.</p> <p>In the FY 26 Budget the City is trying to address these issues such as over-hiring positions (fire fighters), controls on OT spending for EMS, contractual services for EMS (where there are vacancies), and increasing recruitment.</p>
<p>Councilman Dorsey's:</p> <p>Why don't we close positions that have been vacant for over 18 months and move that money over into the dedicated overtime budget? In recent years the Council has had to approve year-end supplemental in FY 23 and FY 24 and are expected to approve year-end supplemental in FY 25.</p> <p>What are some of the fiscal controls to prevent agencies from overspending?</p> <p>Concerns about the truth in budgeting. Will need to ask the City Administrator who is accountable/ and what are the consequences (not an official committee request).</p>	<p>Director Larsen:</p> <p>The Police Commissioner is working on stabilizing staffing through the recruitment strategy.</p> <p>Additionally, using a new framework in Workday to approve expenditures and those workflows were decentralized out to agencies. BBMR is working with the Finance Director and HR Director to reinsert harder budget checks into our overall system to prevent overspending. We are monitoring quarterly but want to catch trends of overspending in the first quarter to adjust as needed. Additional measures include reviewing positions that are being filled and budgeted correctly, checks on non-personnel expenditures, and review of contracts.</p>

	Management of budget falls to the agency director and accountability is managed through the City Administrator.
<p>Councilwoman McCray's:</p> <p>How much was budgeted for FY 25?</p> <p>And how much are you anticipating spending in FY25.</p>	<p>Director Larsen:</p> <p>FY26 budgeted \$89.5 million and FY25 \$76.7</p> <p>Projecting to spend approximately \$144 million in terms of OT for FY25. Anticipated an \$8 million deficit therefore expecting to come back with supplemental appropriations.</p> <p>Working with agencies to drive down costs before we go into supplementals.</p>
<p>Councilman Jones:</p> <p>Shift over to HR policies and notes the December 2024 City Auditor's report that indicates the City does not have the ability to track and monitor the effectiveness and efficiency of hiring.</p> <p>What are the three most important actions we need to take right now to ensure that we can effectively hire people with the right skill set?</p> <p>When will you start being able to report data from Workday updates?</p>	<p>Director Brinkley:</p> <p>DHR has done a lot since the audit came out in December that includes updating Workday functionality and completing training in Workday for agencies.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Acting with intention and urgency – Reviewing candidates and completing the screening quickly</li> <li>2. Determining need – Ensuring we have the right position classification or update the classification</li> <li>3. Working with the agencies on the recruitment process.</li> </ol> <p>Plan on reporting once there is at least 6 months of Data (September 2025).</p>
<p>Councilman Glover:</p> <p>Why does the City contract so many of the City jobs?</p> <p>If DPW has over-hired, why do we have contractors?</p> <p>Does the FY 2026 budget include investment to raise wages consistent with salary recommendations?</p>	<p>Director Larsen:</p> <p>FY 2026 there is an intention to change contracts to permanent positions. It's not a one size fits all – DPW is a great example of having success in moving towards permanent positions. Strategies that include reclassification, changing qualification requirements, and improving recruitment strategies.</p>

	<p>DPW is working on bringing on new crews, but supplements with contractors to meet the immediate need until the crew can be created – DPW Director can expand on this issue at their Agency Budget Hearing.</p> <p>The City is actively in negotiations with the nine City Unions and wages are part of that effort.</p>
<p>Councilman Conway:</p> <p><i>How much was budgeted for overtime for both Fire and Police in FY23 and FY24?</i></p> <p>What are the steps to address issues with the Fire and Police Departments?</p> <p><i>What is the base salary for an incoming paramedic and police officer?</i></p>	<p>Director Larsen:</p> <p><i>Follow up through a Committee Request.</i></p> <p>Both the Fire Chief and Police Commissioner are focused on increasing staffing levels within their departments.</p> <p>Police officer incoming salary around \$60-65K. <i>Follow up through a Committee Request regarding the paramedic salary.</i></p>
<p>Councilwoman Porter:</p> <p>What is the connection to service delivery, vacancies and overtime?</p> <p>How are we using technology and AI to optimize DPW?</p> <p><i>How much in total OT costs that the City incurs equates to costs per city residents?</i></p>	<p>Director Larsen:</p> <p>The goal is to ensure permanent filled slots are sufficient to meet daily minimum staffing services. We know staffing models have changed looking at best practices. An example of that is looking at progress DPW has made – where significant investment to ensure there were the right number of crews.</p> <p>We can see the use of technology to optimize service delivery routes for trash and now recycling (also doing that with street sweeping).</p> <p><i>Follow up through a Committee Request.</i></p>
<p>Councilman Parker</p> <p>In the presentation there was a discussion about reallocating resources within the police department as part of the civilianization efforts. <i>What is the total number of positions that have gone through the civilianization process at BPD?</i></p>	<p>Director Larsen:</p> <p>In terms of getting the pins classified, created, filled, trained, and then getting the officer back into patrol has been a longer lead time than what was anticipated. <i>Follow up through a Committee Request.</i></p>

<p>Follow up regarding recruitment efforts particularly within the Police and Fire Departments. What does that look like and how are we retaining our existing workers.</p> <p><i>What is the turnover rate in the Fire Department? Provide the retention data and include an analysis on the primary reasons people leave (across the Fire Department).</i></p> <p>Does the ability to accumulate overtime a way for employees to receive compensation increases that would not otherwise receive?</p> <p>Is there a process to cross-train firefighters with EMT?</p>	<p>Director Brinkley:</p> <p>The city can match internal offers and for external offers the city can offer a little above. DHR advises agencies on their respective retention strategies and DHR can consult with them. They would need to reach out to us during their recruitment.</p> <p><i>Follow up through a Committee Request.</i></p> <p>Goal is to provide services with regular shift work. There are active Union negotiations to address salaries.</p> <p>The Fire dept can provide additional data training programs and the apprenticeship program with City Schools.</p>
<p>Councilman Conway</p> <p><i>Share the median rate of OT for all major positions to include Police and Firefighters (in Hours and Salary)?</i></p>	<p>Director Larsen:</p> <p><i>Follow up through a Committee Request.</i></p> <p>Also flag that contracts for both unions have different seniority provisions in terms of how staff work overtime (could distort data).</p>
<p>Councilman Blanchard:</p> <p>Why wouldn't we adjust the budget accordingly with vacant positions in last year's budget.</p> <p>With the Police Consent Decree, it directs the City to achieve a certain staffing level.</p>	<p>Director Larsen:</p> <p>That was part of the strategy for balancing the FY25 budget. Additionally, we have less vacant positions than we were last year – so overall decrease in vacancies. Ultimately this is policy decisions regarding operations.</p> <p>Director Themelis:</p> <p>While the City has a goal of filling those vacant positions every year, we know we might not reach that goal. However, the consent decree mandates that we have a certain level of service and have a staffing model that matches.</p>
<p>Councilwoman Ramos:</p> <p>What happens when we put in for a position, but it takes 6 months to hire?</p>	<p>Director Larsen:</p> <p>We've made improvements in Workday so</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Agencies can access funds as soon as budget is approved</li> </ul>

<p>We received the data for the ARPA positions. some will be absorbed into GF but could some be reclassified to the vacancies – such as the Health Dept. which has 65 positions are vacant.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In the event of delay – surplus funding for that position – agencies can use it for 1-time costs. If you are hiring a new person that didn't exist – use that surplus to accommodate space and startup costs.</li> </ul> <p>Yes, that's the goal to ensure those ARPA finds are matched.</p>
<p>Councilman Gray:</p> <p><i>Provide a study on OT utilization and leave trends in the top 5 agencies (that includes the use of excessive leave).</i></p> <p>CP Cohen: <i>Request for a write up to determine what that study would look like and then sidebar about the timeline.</i></p>	<p>Director Larsen:</p> <p><i>Follow up through a Committee Request. This is a larger project and would need to consult with the City Administrator.</i></p>
<p>Councilman Shleifer:</p> <p>How many fines and fees are being studied and considered for increase in the next fiscal year?</p> <p>Concerned about the unnecessary burden that constituents will have if these are increased.</p> <p>Is there a way to look a fines/fees and achieve those expenditure savings by eliminating vacancies?</p> <p><i>What is the total budget valued for long-term vacant positions?</i></p> <p>What is the current vacancy rate? Comments about taking 10% of the vacant positions to use instead of increasing taxes.</p> <p>What steps/controls to ensure equity in hiring and how does it reflect the demographics within the City of Baltimore? Can you report on agencies that has a proportionate percentage of the Jewish community in Baltimore?</p>	<p>Director Larsen:</p> <p>City inventory 2000 fees (3 groups)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Current evaluating Group 1 – about 640 Fines/Fees</li> <li>- Looking at the oldest subset of fines/fees that have not been updated for many years, what the structure is and how they are collected</li> <li>- It doesn't mean all the fines/fees will be increased.</li> </ul> <p>We could look at it, but then there needs to be a discussion on service reduction.</p> <p><i>Follow up through a Committee Request.</i></p> <p>The vacancy rate is down by 12%. And the current vacancy rate is about 19% that reflects 2,736 positions.</p> <p>Director Brinkley:</p> <p>In Workday there is an equity dashboard – to review Hiring and Turnover (Sexual orientation, race, gender, area of city, position they are in – but does not capture religion).</p>

<i>Provide the percentage of city employees living in each of the Council Districts (specifically the 5th district).</i>	<i>Follow up through a Committee Request.</i>
--	---

### Further Study

Was further study requested?

☒ Yes ☐ No

If yes, describe.

Committee Member	Request	Requested Agency	Request Due By
Conway	How much was actually budgeted for overtime for both Fire and Police in FY23 and FY24?  What is the base salary for an incoming paramedic?	BBMR	5/27/2025
Porter	How much in total OT costs that the City incurs equates to costs per city residents?	BBMR	5/30/2025
Parker	What is the total number of positions that have gone through the civilianization process at BPD.	BBMR	5/27/2025
Parker	What is the turnover rate in the Fire Department? Provide the retention data and include an analysis on the primary reasons people leave (across the Fire Department).	DHR/Fire Dept	5/29/2025
Conway	Share the median rate of OT for all major positions to include Police and Firefighters (in Hours and Salary)?	BBMR	5/27/2025
Gray	Provide a study on OT utilization and leave trends in the top 5 agencies (that includes the use of excessive leave).	BBMR/City Administrator	TBD (Request for 9/1/2025)
Schleifer	What is the total budget valued for long-term vacant positions?	BBMR	5/27/2025
Schleifer	Provide the percentage of city employees living in each of the Council Districts (specifically the 5th district)	DHR	6/5/2025



---

**Committee Vote: N/A**

---

Paroma Nandi, Committee Staff

Date: 5/22/2025

Cc: Bill File