



**Bernard C. “Jack” Young**  
Mayor

# BALTIMORE POLICE DEPARTMENT



**Michael S. Harrison**  
Police Commissioner

November 19, 2020

Honorable President and  
Members of the Baltimore City Council  
Room 400, City Hall  
100 N. Holliday Street  
Baltimore, Maryland 21202

**RE: Equity Analysis/Bill report for City Council Resolution 20-0218R  
Recognizing Systemic Racism as a Public Health Crisis**

Dear Council President Scott and Members of the City Council:

The Baltimore Police Department (BPD) has reviewed Council Resolution 20-0218R which recognizes systemic racism as a public health crisis. The impact of the resolution on equity in Baltimore will largely depend on subsequent action taken by the City and its constituent agencies to address the problem being acknowledged. The Baltimore Police Department (BPD) is committed to not only acknowledging systemic racism, but dismantling it and contributing to an anti-racist City government.

Systemic racism is the dynamic system of political, economic, and social practices and institutions that produces and replicates racial inequities that cut across society. These inequities privilege whiteness and disadvantage people of color, sometimes unintentionally.<sup>1</sup> Systemic racism is reinforced by institutional racism, or the racial inequity within institutions such as schools or police that can take the form of unfair policies, discriminatory treatment, and inequitable outcomes.<sup>2</sup>

The BPD is committed to dismantling systemic racism, beginning by destroying its institutional contributions to that system of discriminatory outcomes. Under the Consent Decree, the BPD has begun the process of overhauling its policies, training, technology, supervision, and other functions of the organization that have produced disproportionately negative outcomes for Black, non-white Hispanic, and other marginalized people. Selected examples of this ongoing reform include the development of new policies requiring limited use of force, fair and impartial policing, and creating the behavioral health Crisis Response Team.

Holistic police reform requires institutional and systemic reform to be effective. Because dismantling racism requires addressing its root causes, not just its symptoms, BPD employs a systems approach that demands collaboration with agencies capable of addressing the conditions that lead to police intervention. Reforms in crisis

<sup>1</sup> Henry, F. (2006). *The Colour of Democracy: Racism in Canadian Society*. 3rd Ed. Toronto, ON: Nelson

<sup>2</sup> Annie E. Casey Foundation (2014). *Embracing Equity: Racial Equity and Inclusion Action Guide*. Baltimore, MD

response illustrate the differences. New policies, officer training, and accountability measures are early efforts to address institutional reform—improving outcomes connected to BPD. The BPD also coordinates with the Collaborative Planning and Implementation Committee,<sup>3</sup> which conducted an analysis of gaps in the behavioral health system in Baltimore that must be addressed in order to provide the most effective, least police-involved response to behavioral health crises. This systemic approach identifies and mobilizes the most appropriate resource(s) and institution(s) needed to support positive mental health, which may or may not involve the police. The focus is on improving the outcome for the community by leveraging all institutions in the system when and where they have a role to play.

This systems-level approach can be scaled to meet broader public health needs rooted in racism. Housing segregation, employment discrimination, public school disinvestment, and unaffordable healthcare are just some of the race-based factors contributing to community violence—a major public health issue<sup>4</sup> that disproportionately harms Black and non-white Hispanic residents in Baltimore. While BPD works to more equitably detect, disrupt, and deter violence, effective violence prevention requires the systemic deployment of resources only available outside of BPD to the people who need those resources most. Addressing racial disparities earlier in the process will compound BPD’s ability to reduce racial disparities in police interactions, and reduce the overall need for police intervention.

Passage of City Council Resolution 20-0218R may serve as an initial step in the mobilization of a City-wide strategy and coalition to acknowledge, confront, and dismantle systemic racism. This action would accelerate and strengthen BPD’s ongoing work to advance racial equity, and improve quality of life for all members of the Baltimore community.

The BPD supports City Council Bill 20-0218R and looks forward to participating in a robust conversation during the hearing.

Sincerely,

Bill Joyner  
*Equity Officer*  
*Baltimore Police Department*

cc: Natawna Austin, Executive Secretary of the Baltimore City Council  
Dominic McAlily, Legislative Assistant, Office of the Council President  
Nick Blendy, Deputy Director, MOGR  
Matt Stegman, Mayor’s Legislative Liaison  
Eric Melancon, BPD Chief of Staff  
Andrew Smullian, BPD Deputy Chief of Staff  
Michelle Wirzberger, BPD Director of Government Relations

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<sup>3</sup> [https://www.baltimorepolice.org/sites/default/files/General%20Website%20PDFs/Policy\\_Subcommittee\\_Overview.pdf](https://www.baltimorepolice.org/sites/default/files/General%20Website%20PDFs/Policy_Subcommittee_Overview.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/socialdeterminants/about.html>