

BALTIMORE CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Letter of Information
Baltimore City Council Resolution 19-0156R
Informational Hearing – Water Outages

July 29, 2019

As drafted, Council Resolution 19-0156R calls on agency leaders to discuss protocols in place for, and best practices to provide assistance to, Baltimore City residents in the event they lose access to water. Baltimore City Public Schools (City Schools) appreciates the opportunity to provide background regarding the district’s actions in this area and hopes this information will be helpful in informing the Council’s discussion of the proposed resolution.

The district is committed to maintaining safe physical environments for our students. Water outages are treated with extreme seriousness as schools, quite simply, cannot operate without water – bathrooms cannot be used as toilets cannot flush, and food preparation is also impacted. As such, we generally do not even wait the standard two hours before calling for a building closure. Schools, in fact, can go longer without electricity than they can water.

In the event of a water outage, City Schools’ operations team immediately contacts the Department of Public Works (DPW). Unless DPW provides clear indication that the outage will be brief, and that water will be restored shortly, the district errs on the side of closing the impacted school(s) for the day or calling for the early release of students.

In the recent case of a water main break that affected Vivien T. Thomas Medical Arts Academy, the district did relocate students on the third day of the outage so that students could finish their final exams. Water was out (or at least water pressure was so low that toilets could not flush) on both Tuesday and Wednesday, and so the school was closed both days. When it remained uncertain whether water would be restored on Thursday, we announced a plan midday Wednesday whereby final exams for Vivien T. students would take place at Augusta Fells Savage given that they had space available because their students were only taking makeup exams on that particular day. By announcing the plan in advance, students and families had time to plan for getting to Augusta Fells Savage.

That said, please note the circumstances that allowed us to relocate students from Vivien T. to Augusta Fells Savage were unique. We could not have done so if it had been any day other than the last day of school. We generally do not have space to relocate schools if a multi-day water outage were to occur – particularly as any vacant space we currently have is being utilized as swing

space for schools whose buildings are being renovated as part of the 21st Century buildings program.

In short, in the vast majority of cases, the most we can do upon losing water is to immediately close the impacted school. We appreciate the City Council's attention to this matter and will be pleased to provide additional information if needed.

For additional information, please contact City Schools Government Affairs:

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