

**CITY OF BALTIMORE  
COUNCIL BILL 07-0292R  
(Resolution)**

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Introduced by: Councilmembers Harris, Young, Curran, Clarke, Reisinger, Conaway, Kraft,  
Welch, Spector, Middleton

Introduced and read first time: April 30, 2007

Assigned to: Public Safety Subcommittee

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REFERRED TO THE FOLLOWING AGENCIES: Police Commissioner

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A RESOLUTION ENTITLED

1 A COUNCIL RESOLUTION concerning

2 **Informational Hearing – Baltimore City Police Department –**  
3 **Use of Tasers or Other Electronic Control Weapons – Risk Management**

4 FOR the purpose of requesting the Commissioner of Police to share with the City Council and the  
5 citizens of Baltimore the Department’s policy for the use of Tasers or other electronic control  
6 weapons, the protocol for use of this “less than lethal” force weapon, the immediate health  
7 implications and risk of latent medical complications to persons subjected to electronic  
8 control weapons, and any plans for changes in current policy as they pertain to the use of  
9 electronic control weapons in law enforcement deployment in the neighborhoods of  
10 Baltimore City.

11 **Recitals**

12 The recent death of a Baltimore women in custody this past Tuesday after being struck in the  
13 chest with a stun gun, or Taser, as she allegedly attacked a city officer “without provocation”  
14 during a narcotics investigation, was the second in the Baltimore area in the last 2 months – in  
15 March, a mentally ill Baltimore County man died after officers shocked him after he attacked  
16 them, armed with a baseball bat.

17 These incidents bring new attention to the simmering debate on the effectiveness and safety  
18 of the use of electronic control weapons in incidents where law enforcement officers deem it  
19 appropriate to use “less than lethal” force and where the use of firearms and “shoot to kill”  
20 tactics are unwarranted to protect the safety of the officer, the public, or the perpetrator.

21 By May 2005, the U. S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) in a report to the  
22 Chairman, Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats and International Relations,  
23 Congressional Committee on Government Reform, reported that Tasers were used by over 7,000  
24 of the 18,000 laws enforcement agencies in the United States, with more than 140,000 Tasers in  
25 use by police officers in the field and an additional 100,000 Tasers owned by civilians  
26 worldwide.

27 The GAO document states “the Taser fires two metal barbs that are attached to wires, which  
28 can cover a distance of up to 25 feet. Once the barbs are embedded in an individual or on the  
29 individual’s clothing, the weapon delivers an electrical charge of 50,000 volts through the wires  
30 to the barbs. This charge causes the muscles of the individual to involuntarily contract, which

EXPLANATION: Underlining indicates matter added by amendment.  
~~Strike out~~ indicates matter deleted by amendment.

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1 immediately incapacitates the individual for the duration of the shock, usually lasting about 5  
2 seconds. The barbs need not be embedded in an individual’s body in order to function. Because  
3 of the high voltage, an individual will be shocked even if the barbs are attached to an outer layer  
4 of clothing, such as a coat. The Taser can be reactivated numerous times as long as the barbs  
5 remain in the individual or the individual’s clothing.”

6 Amnesty International, the well-known human rights group and a leading opponent of the  
7 use of Tasers, holds that the electrical charges delivered by stun guns are responsible for 254  
8 deaths since 2001 – a claim refuted by medical examiners who claim that for the most part the  
9 deaths can not be directly attributed to the stun guns but were the result of other underlying  
10 medical conditions such as heart disease or drug addiction.

11 The results of a Canadian study, published in the Journal of the American College of  
12 Cardiology, seem to indicate that death may indeed be directly attributable to stun guns, such as  
13 the Taser, that present cardiac risks – researchers found that stun gun use across the chest can  
14 cause cardiac stimulation at high rates, posing a severe health risk.

15 In the *Proceedings of the Large Jail Network Meeting, Winter 2006: The Question of Tasers*,  
16 a representative of the International Association of the Chiefs of Police cautioned that the  
17 organization was reconsidering the use of Tasers because of the “sheer number of lawsuits” and  
18 the high risk factors of individuals most often involved in incidents where stun guns are used  
19 including:

- 20 • Excited delirium;
- 21 • Substance abuse – cocaine, crack, meth, PCP;
- 22 • Those with heart disease are more susceptible;
- 23 • The mentally ill are more often shocked.

24 It is important that Baltimore City law enforcement have an alternative to the use of lethal  
25 force. However, the public must be certain that the “non-lethal” force does not become a “lethal  
26 force” when used in incidents involving persons who might be at risk to suffer fatal  
27 consequences as a result of their exposure to the electric volts delivered by electronic control  
28 weapons.

29 **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF BALTIMORE**, That the  
30 Commissioner of Police is requested to share with the City Council and the citizens of Baltimore  
31 the Department’s policy for the use of Tasers or other electronic control weapons, the protocol  
32 for use of this “less than lethal” force weapon, the immediate health implications and risk of  
33 latent medical complications to persons subjected to electronic control weapons, and any plans  
34 for changes in current policy as they pertain to the use of electronic control weapons in law  
35 enforcement deployment in the neighborhoods of Baltimore City.

36 **AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, That a copy of this Resolution be sent to the Mayor, the  
37 Baltimore City Police Commissioner, the organizations listed in the Planning Department  
38 Directory of Community Associations, and the Mayor’s Legislative Liaison to the City Council.