

BaltAC

FROM	NAME & TITLE	Robert Cename, Budget Director	CITY of BALTIMORE MEMO	
	AGENCY NAME & ADDRESS	Bureau of the Budget and Management Research Room 432, City Hall (410) 396-4774		
	SUBJECT	City Council Bill 21-0050 – Burglar Alarms Registration and Regulation – False Alarms		

DATE:

TO

The Honorable President and
Members of the City Council
City Hall, Room 400

April 27, 2021

Position: Support

The Department of Finance is herein reporting on City Council Bill 21-0050, Burglar Alarms Registration and Regulation – False Alarms, the purpose of which is adjust the fine structure for false alarms, lowering the number of false alarms in a year for placement into no-response status, and requiring alarm system monitors to contact multiple user phone numbers prior to requesting police response.

Background

Currently, all users and alarm system monitors are required by law to register with the City through the Department of Housing and Community Development. When a user's alarm triggers, the monitor contacts the user and, if necessary, will request a police response. These calls take approximately 15 to 20 minutes for each response. Although this is a short amount of time, the volume of false alarms received is a burden and takes officers away from more urgent calls.

The City holds the users of alarm systems responsible for false alarms, which is defined as a triggered alarm that police respond to for which there is no evidence of any criminal activity, property damage, or medical emergency found after reasonable investigation that would justify a police response. The first false alarm in a 12-month period is waived. However, there is an associated fee with additional false alarms, with the fees ranging from \$50 for the second offense to \$500 for the twelfth offense for residential users and \$2,000 for the fifteenth offense for non-residential users. Currently, if a user has ten false alarms within a 12-month period, they are given notice they will be placed on no-response status once they reach fifteen false alarms. No-response status means that, except for a hold-up alarm or a panic alarm, police will not be dispatched to investigate an alarm signal. The new legislation reduces the number of false alarms required for placement on no-response status from fifteen to five.

Currently, prior to requesting a police response to an alarm signal, a monitor must attempt to contact the alarm system site, by telephone, electronically, or visually, to verify the need for a police response. The proposed legislation would require, that a second attempt be made to a different number if the first attempt fails to reach the alarm user or an individual at the alarm system site who can properly identify themselves to determine the validity of the alarm signal. This revision aligns with common practice among monitors. In addition, this legislation changes the fine structure by increasing the fine amount for residential users and providing a separate fine schedule for non-residential users.

Non-Residential False Alarms Fine		
# of False Alarms	Current Fine	Proposed Fine
1	\$0	\$0
2	\$50	\$150
3	\$50	\$150
4	\$100	\$300
5	\$150	\$500
6	\$200	\$500
7	\$250	\$500
8	\$300	\$500
9	\$350	\$500
10	\$400	\$500
11	\$450	\$500
12	\$1,000	\$500
13	\$1,000	\$500
14	\$1,000	\$500
15+	\$2,000	\$500

Residential False Alarms Fine		
# of False Alarms	Current Fine	Proposed Fine
1	\$0	\$0
2	\$50	\$75
3	\$50	\$75
4	\$100	\$150
5	\$150	\$250
6	\$200	\$250
7	\$250	\$250
8	\$300	\$250
9	\$350	\$250
10	\$400	\$250
11	\$450	\$250
12+	\$500	\$250

The total alarms registered as of Fiscal 2020, was 123,765. This total contains 12,009 businesses and 111,756 residential users.

Fiscal Impact

The Department of Finance estimates that in a typical year, the current fine structure results in \$315,000 in false alarms fines being billed. The change in fine structure would increase that billing to \$363,000. In addition, it should be noted that despite the usage of the term “fee” in the law and legislation, the structure is actually a fine. Therefore, Finance did not complete an analysis of the fee analysis.

Currently, the City collects roughly 50% of the billed total in a given year. The proposed fine structure change would result in a revenue increase of \$24,000 per year. In addition, approximately 21.7% of the fines are issued to residential alarm users and 78.3% to non-residential users, which is the basis for a separate and higher fine structure for non-residential users.

Finance reviewed the law and fines in Baltimore, Anne Arundel, Howard, Harford, and Prince George’s Counties and found that several counties do not differentiate between residential and non-residential properties. Baltimore County has a similar fine structure compared to the City’s current structure, while none of the other jurisdictions researched had differing fines by user type. In addition, all other counties, except for Harford, waived the second false alarm in a 12-month period. The proposed fine structure is higher than average compared to other jurisdictions for both residential and non-residential alarm users at several levels. However, these differences are not material and would not impact a large majority of users. Of all the open accounts that registered a false alarm during Fiscal 2019, 97.9% had four or less false alarms, with 62.1% only having one false alarm.

Residential False Alarms Fee						
# of False Alarms	Balt. City New	Balt. County	AA County*	Howard County	Harford County	PG County**
1	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
2	\$75	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$100	\$0
3	\$75	\$70	\$50	\$50	\$500	\$0
4	\$150	\$70	\$50	\$100	\$1,000	\$50
5	\$250	\$105	\$75	\$150	\$1,000	\$50
6	\$250	\$140	\$100	\$200	\$1,000	\$50
7	\$250	\$175	\$125	\$250	\$1,000	\$100
8	\$250	\$210	\$150	\$300	\$1,000	\$100
9	\$250	\$280	\$175	\$350	\$1,000	\$100
10	\$250	\$350	\$200	\$400	\$1,000	\$150
11	\$250	\$420	\$225	\$500	\$1,000	\$150
12	\$250	\$490	\$250	\$600	\$1,000	\$150
13	\$250	\$560	\$250	\$700	\$1,000	\$200
14	\$250	\$700	\$250	\$800	\$1,000	\$200
15+	\$250	\$700	\$250	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$200

Non-Residential False Alarms Fee						
# of False Alarms	Balt. City	Balt. County	AA County*	Howard County	Harford County	PG County**
1	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
2	\$150	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$100	\$0
3	\$150	\$70	\$50	\$50	\$500	\$0
4	\$300	\$70	\$50	\$100	\$1,000	\$50
5	\$500	\$105	\$75	\$150	\$1,000	\$50
6	\$500	\$140	\$100	\$200	\$1,000	\$50
7	\$500	\$175	\$125	\$250	\$1,000	\$100
8	\$500	\$210	\$150	\$300	\$1,000	\$100
9	\$500	\$280	\$175	\$350	\$1,000	\$100
10	\$500	\$350	\$200	\$400	\$1,000	\$150
11	\$500	\$420	\$225	\$500	\$1,000	\$150
12	\$500	\$490	\$250	\$600	\$1,000	\$150
13	\$500	\$560	\$250	\$700	\$1,000	\$200
14	\$500	\$1,000	\$250	\$800	\$1,000	\$200
15+	\$500	\$1,000	\$250	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$200

*Anne Arundel

**Prince George's

Other Considerations

Alarm registration used to include a fee of \$20, but that was removed in 2012. This provided a mechanism to maintain the registration list on a yearly basis. Currently once an alarm is registered it stays in the system until the City is notified that the account is no longer active or there is a false alarm at the property and research is conducted to see if the registration matches the owner or occupant. If the City implemented a registration and renewal requirement on an annual or multi-year cycle, which required all past due false alarm bills be paid, it would increase the accuracy of registrations, lead to less false alarms, and increase revenue collection.

Conclusion

This legislation intends to curb the amount of false alarms requiring police response, pulling officers from other more urgent calls. The reduction of false alarms required for no-response status and the increased fine structure is expected to reduce the burden of officers' time and lead to less false alarms.

For the reasons stated above, the Department of Finance supports City Council Bill 21-0050.

cc: Henry Raymond
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