



SHEILA DIXON
Mayor

BALTIMORE POLICE DEPARTMENT



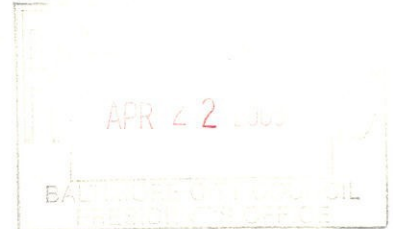
FREDERICK H. BEALEFELD, III
Police Commissioner

April 22, 2009

TO: The Honorable President and Members
of the Baltimore City Council
Room 400 City Hall
Attn. Karen Randle

FROM: Deborah A. Owens, ^{DAO} Deputy Commissioner, Administrative Division
^{HHS} James H. Green, Legal Affairs Section
Baltimore Police Department

RE: City Council Bill No. 09-0118R-Investiagive Hearing-Crime Alerts-Citywide Text Messaging



The Baltimore Police Department (BPD) has reviewed City Council Bill 09-0118R-Investiagive Hearing-Crime Alerts-Citywide Text Messaging which requests the Police Commissioner to investigate the efficacy of instituting a citywide text messaging system to alert residents about criminal activity in a timely manner. The bill also calls for a determination of what crimes should be included in these types of alerts.

The recitals of the bill discuss the explosion of popularity in the use of text messaging and how in November of 2008, the District of Columbia's Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) joined with cities and counties in the region to use text alert notification.

The BPD is very familiar with the technology that is used in D.C. and several other jurisdictions. Last month, representatives of our Communications Section met with the vender that provides this technology. Baltimore currently uses a form of this technology to deliver crime pages/alerts to members of the BPD. Our system is based on the number of licenses and a system for the general public is based upon the population, not the actual users. There is a cost associated with the expansion of this system and therefore the BPD is exploring other options.

Currently, the BPD is experimenting with a similar system called Nixle, <http://www.nixle.com/> which provides a subscriber-based geographic alerting system that can send e-mails and text and post alerts on-line. They have developed a free service for law enforcement through the National Law Enforcement Teletype System (NLETS). This service provides several alert levels: alerts, advisories, traffic, and community. Each alert is sent by SMS (with limited characters), and by e-mail. The e-mail and web based

Comments

alerts have the ability to include pictures of suspects or missing persons, etc. The Department will be piloting this system in the Southeast District starting in mid-April. Initially the system will be used to send information regarding alerts/advisories/information relative to community activities or significant events such as Citizen on Patrol (COP) walks, traffic concerns, road closures, major accidents, and limited crime information such as major arrests or missing persons. It is intended to complement the other citizen alert systems such as the Communicator currently used in Baltimore.

As part of Mayor Dixon's community engagement crime fighting strategy, the BPD Public Affairs Section has also been utilizing social networking websites to disseminate public information. Specifically, Facebook, Twitter and You-Tube are used to distribute this information, photos and video in real time about significant crime events, major arrests, and traffic situations occurring throughout the city. This "direct to consumer" method allows the Department to ensure that pertinent information gets out and does not have to wait for next day newspapers or the nightly news. For the media, advisories are also sent through Twitter and Facebook so that reporters and news desks are provided with up-to-the-minute information as possible. Nixle has compatibility with posting alerts to Twitter.

Since establishing an on-line presence in March, the response from the community, news media, and neighboring law enforcement agencies has been overwhelmingly supportive. Collectively between Facebook and Twitter, the BPD shows that approximately 1,300 individuals are following this information.

The BPD continues to better integrate this technology into its daily operations. As such the BPD remains steadfast in its commitment to public safety in Baltimore and will continue to work with the community to enhance their understanding about the utilization of these systems. Moving forward, with improvements in technology and our ability to disseminate information, we hope to continue to instill confidence in community perception and deliver enhancements to overall public safety.

The BPD is pleased to provide to the Council an update of our progress and a guide to the future impact that this technology provides to our citizens. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this legislation.

cc: Frederick H. Bealefeld III, Police Commissioner, BPD
Angela Gibson, Mayor's Legislative Liaison