

**CITY OF BALTIMORE
COUNCIL BILL 21-0017R
(Resolution)**

Introduced by: Councilmembers Burnett, Porter, Middleton, Bullock, Cohen, Stokes

Introduced and read first time: February 8, 2021

Assigned to: Public Safety and Government Operations

Committee Report: Favorable

Adopted: July 19, 2021

A COUNCIL RESOLUTION CONCERNING

**Investigative Hearing – Arson and Fire Fatality Awareness:
Re-instituting the Baltimore City Joint Agency Arson Task Force**

FOR the purpose of inviting representatives from the Baltimore City Fire Department, the Baltimore Police Department, the Office of the State’s Attorney for Baltimore City, the Baltimore City Health Department, the Baltimore City Department of Housing and Community Development, the Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice, the Baltimore City Public School System, and the Mayor’s Office of Homeless Services to appear before the City Council to discuss arsons, fire fatalities and injuries, and school fires; how we can work to re-institute the Joint Agency Arson Task Force; and discuss other tools that would assist in the prevention or prosecution of arson.

Recitals

Baltimore City ended 2020 with 7 fire fatalities, the lowest number of fire related deaths in the history of the Baltimore City Fire Department. Despite this historic milestone, the Baltimore City Fire Department closed out the decade with over 2,400 cases of arson, 185 fire fatalities, and 250 school fires. By any measure, Baltimore City has a fire problem.

Arsons endanger the lives of citizens, who are often innocent bystanders of these acts, and Fire Department personnel who are called on to respond to these incidents. Arson destroys more than buildings; it can devastate a community resulting in the decline of economic development, increased insurance premiums, financial hardships for people already living on fixed incomes, loss of business revenue, and a decrease in property values. Some of the reasons why people commit arson are to conceal other violent crimes, fraud, vandalism, and pyromania.

Acknowledging the catastrophic toll that arson takes on the wellbeing of our communities, the City Council would like a briefing on what systems are in place to ensure that there is a coordinated investigation between the Baltimore City Fire Department, the Baltimore Police Department, and the Office of the State’s Attorney. Moreover, the discussion should include a frank assessment of the Baltimore City Fire Department’s and Baltimore Police Department’s arson units staffing and average caseload per investigator and whether we have the correct number of personnel assigned to keep pace with the high number of arson investigations that occur in the City. Finally, the Fire Department should be prepared to brief the Council on detailed statistical data on the total number of arsons that have occurred in each of the last five years, segmented by what property set on fire, and what the clearance rate was for that crime each

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

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1 year.

2 Using this information, we as a City government can begin the process of developing
3 a coordinated plan to implement proven policies such as a Joint Agency Arson Task Force or a
4 Community Arson Watch Program that would lead to significant declines and arson across the
5 City.

6 **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF BALTIMORE,** That the
7 Council invites representatives from the Baltimore City Fire Department, the Baltimore Police
8 Department, the Office of the State’s Attorney for Baltimore City, the Baltimore City Health
9 Department, the Baltimore City Department of Housing and Community Development, the
10 Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice, the Baltimore City Public School System, and the Mayor’s
11 Office of Homeless Services to appear before the City Council to discuss arsons, fire fatalities
12 and injuries, and school fires; how we can work to re-institute the Joint Agency Arson Task
13 Force; and discuss other policies that would assist in the prevention or prosecution of arson.

14 **AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED,** That a copy of this Resolution be sent to the Mayor, the
15 Chief of the Baltimore City Fire Department, the Baltimore City Police Commissioner, the
16 State’s Attorney for Baltimore City, the Commissioner of the Baltimore City Health Department,
17 the Commissioner of the Baltimore City Department of Housing and Community Development,
18 the Director of the Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice, the Chief Executive Office of the
19 Baltimore City Public School System, the Director of the Mayor’s Office of Homeless Services,
20 and the Mayor's Legislative Liaison to the City Council.