



# BALTIMORE POLICE DEPARTMENT



**Brandon M. Scott**  
Mayor

**Michael S. Harrison**  
Police Commissioner

June 30, 2021

Honorable President and Members of the Baltimore City Council  
Room 400, City Hall  
100 N. Holliday Street  
Baltimore, Maryland 21202

**RE: City Council Bill #21-0049R**  
**Investigational Hearing - Existing Alternatives to Policing Strategies**

Dear Council President Mosby and Members of the City Council:

The Baltimore Police Department (BPD) has reviewed Council Bill 21-0049R for the purpose of inviting representatives from ROCA, Safe Streets, the Baltimore Police Department's Group Violence Prevention Strategy, and 911 Diversion Program, and the Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement to inform the City Council about the existing alternatives to policing strategies the City has in its arsenal.

Thank you so much for allowing BPD to respond to this resolution. The Department agrees that successfully providing for public safety and violence prevention requires a comprehensive multi-agency approach toward addressing the root causes of crime and violence. The Baltimore Police Department is playing an important but supportive role in developing the non-policing strategies that the City Council has requested to be briefed on. Within the body of this report, we will just touch on the Community Policing and Group Violence Reduction Strategy (GVRS) efforts that BPD is coordinating with MONSE.

## **COMMUNITY POLICING**

In April of 2020, the BPD released its first-ever Community Policing Plan which you can access at: <https://www.baltimorepolice.org/bpd-community-policing-plan>. The mission of this Community Policing Plan is to institutionalize Community Policing principles throughout the Baltimore Police Department to improve police-community relations, and to reduce crime and disorder through collaborative problem-solving partnerships with the community.

Community Policing is a philosophy emphasizing community involvement in crime prevention efforts through three core components: community partnerships, organizational transformation and problem solving:

- **Community partnerships** are involved in defining, prioritizing, and addressing crime problems.
- **Organizational transformation** flattens the department, decentralizes units, and provides executive support for community partnerships and collaborative problem solving.
- **Problem solving** is a process that uses police and community members' expertise to identify, and understand the underlying issues that create crime, disorder, and fear of victimization.

Community Engagement is key to the implementation of Community Policing. Community Engagement refers to activities that foster positive interactions between community members and BPD members, employ Community Policing ideals, create opportunities for constructive exchanges, and foster substantive collaboration between the community and BPD, while enhancing trust and legitimacy. While BPD formerly conducted Community Engagement primarily from centralized units in headquarters, BPD will now expect officers across the Department to engage positively with the community through three specific methods: Informal Community Engagement, Formal Community Engagement, and Daily Problem Solving.

### **Informal Community Engagement**

Refers to ad hoc opportunities to interact with community members. This could include activities such as playing ball with children in the neighborhood between calls or having a conversation with a community resident or business owner during a foot patrol assignment. Simply being present does not qualify as Informal Engagement. Central to this activity is interaction and conversation with community members.

### **Formal Community Engagement**

Refers to participation in neighborhood and community meetings/ events, establishment of external partnerships that focus on long-term programs to promote and foster police-community interactions, and outreach efforts in all neighborhoods, including neighborhoods where no neighborhood association has been established to provide consultation and input to BPD.

### **Daily Problem Solving**

Refers to efforts to address or resolve different problems and issues within the communities that BPD serves. These problems can range from minor disputes between neighbors to high-risk environmental conditions or lesser offense issues. While these problems may not always present an immediate public safety concern, if left un-addressed they can lead to future issues and calls-for-service. Through Daily Problem Solving, officers will work with community members to address community concerns on an ongoing basis.

The BPD is currently delivering community policing training to all sworn members of the Department. The goal of the training is to make clear the new expectation that all officers, regardless of rank or assignment, are expected to work closely with the community to build partnerships and solve problems. We are truly excited about this monumental shift in policing strategy and focus. Moreover, we anticipate that our adoption of a community policing focus will ultimately help to strengthen our relationship with the community we serve and ultimately reduce crime as collaboration and trust between officers and residents grow.

## **GROUP VIOLENCE REDUCTION STRATEGY (GVRS)**

To systematically address overall violence in the community, BPD is working with MONSE and the State's attorney's Office to launch the Group Violence Reduction Strategy (GVRS) which is an evidence-based initiative designed to reduce serious violence. Also known as focused deterrence, the strategy works by engaging directly with those most intimately involved in and affected by violence, leveraging an intentional collaboration between law enforcement, social services, and community members who collectively co-sign and deliver an anti-violence message to stop the shooting. The GVRS message is grounded in the following core tenets:

- Every person and community needs and deserves to be safe;
- Violence is often driven by a very small number of groups and people; and
- To increase safety, we must collectively focus on that small number of people in order to support them in their daily lives, communicate community norms in support of everybody's safety and success, and where necessary create swift, certain, and legitimate sanctions for violence

BPD fully supports City Council Resolution 21-0041R and looks forward to a robust discussion on the many non-policing strategies that are currently being implemented throughout Baltimore City. Thank you for allowing us to comment on this important piece of legislation.

Sincerely,



Michelle Wirzberger, Esq.  
Director of Government Affairs

cc: Natwana Austin, Executive Secretary of the Baltimore City Council  
Natasha Mehu, Director of Mayor's Office of Government Relations  
Nina Themalis, Special Assistant and Legislative Liaison, MOGR  
Eric Melancon, BPD Chief of Staff  
Andrew Smullian, BPD Deputy Chief of Staff