

**CITY OF BALTIMORE
COUNCIL BILL 06-0219R
(Resolution)**

Introduced by: Councilmembers Young, D’Adamo, Kraft, Holton, Reisinger, Clarke, Mitchell,
Welch, Harris, President Dixon, Councilmember Rawlings Blake

Introduced and read first time: September 25, 2006

Assigned to: Judiciary and Legislative Investigations Committee

REFERRED TO THE FOLLOWING AGENCIES: Police Department, Department of Transportation,
Department of Finance

A RESOLUTION ENTITLED

1 A COUNCIL RESOLUTION concerning

2 **Informational Hearing – City Process – Auctioning Off Cars Before Their Time?**

3 FOR the purpose of requesting that the Director of Transportation brief the Council on the current
4 Department of Transportation vehicle auctioning policies, provide information on recent
5 reports that hundreds of cars are being sold before their proper time or without appropriate
6 reason to do so, and how the Department of Transportation and the Police Department plan
7 to fix communication gaps that are allowing the vehicles of Baltimore City citizens to be
8 towed and auctioned off without cause or before there is an appropriate, reasonable
9 opportunity for retrieval.

10 **Recitals**

11 Recent reports have shown that the Baltimore City Department of Transportation has sold
12 10,176 cars in the last year. A few of these vehicles were obtained through seizures by police for
13 drug and other various criminal activities. The majority of these vehicles, however, were
14 obtained because they were considered abandoned or disabled vehicles. The major issue is that
15 many of these vehicles were not abandoned at all. In many cases these cars were simply
16 impounded for parking violations, and the owner failed to retrieve his or her vehicle within the
17 allotted frame of time the City offers before the car can be sold.

18 One of the major problems with the current system is the lack of communication between
19 Police Department and Transportation officials. In order for a car to be impounded, both
20 agencies need to have an active part in the process. If there is even the slightest lack of
21 communication, the Department of Transportation may sell cars while the impoundment is under
22 dispute or may sell a vehicle that never should have been towed in the first place. According to
23 the Department of Transportation, the City sends certified notices to all owners of impounded
24 vehicles. After the owner receives the letter, they have 11 days to claim their vehicle. If the City
25 does not receive a response, it advertises, and if there is still no response, the City sells the car
26 within 45 days. The majority of issues arise when a person is not around to claim his or her
27 vehicle, when a person is in the hospital, for example, or when a person never received his or her
28 certified letter due to a change of address or vehicle sale and therefore simply assumed that his
29 or her vehicle was stolen.

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

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1 A total of 46,501 cars were towed by Baltimore City in the fiscal year 2006. Nearly 43,000
2 of these cars were towed by private contracts that were granted by the City. This amounted to
3 \$4.2 million in fees paid to private tow contractors by citizens of Baltimore City. Out of the
4 46,501 cars towed almost one quarter of them were sold at auction, a staggering 10,176 vehicles.
5 The total value of these vehicles at auction was \$2.8 million. The business of ticketing, towing,
6 and auctioning vehicles has become exactly that, a business. The ticketing, towing, and
7 auctioning policies have become more about making money than about public safety and
8 regulation. With the additional fines for violations, towing fees, and the risk of having a vehicle
9 auctioned off, many Baltimore City citizens are simply afraid to park their vehicles on City
10 streets.

11 According to Citistat, at the last 4 vehicle auctions a total of 1480 vehicles were sold by the
12 Department of Transportation for a total of \$435,323. Over the same period of time, a total of
13 3624 cars were towed, with 3362 of these impoundments being done by Medallion Towers, not
14 Baltimore City. This shows that nearly half of the vehicles towed within Baltimore City are
15 being put up for auction. This staggering statistic simply supports the idea that something needs
16 to be done to reorganize the towing and auction policies currently in place, and a new system
17 should be set up in order to provide a more fair, responsible, and affordable vehicle towing and
18 auction policy for the citizens of the City of Baltimore.

19 **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF BALTIMORE,** That this
20 Body requests that the Director of Transportation brief the Council on the current Department of
21 Transportation vehicle auctioning policies, provide information on recent reports that hundreds
22 of cars are being sold before their proper time or without appropriate reason to do so, and how
23 the Department of Transportation and the Police Department plan to fix communication gaps that
24 are allowing the vehicles of Baltimore City citizens to be towed and auctioned off without cause
25 or before there is an appropriate, reasonable opportunity for retrieval.

26 **AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED,** That a copy of this Resolution be sent to the Mayor, the
27 Director of Transportation, and the Mayor's Legislative Liaison to the Council.