



F R O M	Name & Title	Niles R. Ford, Fire Chief 	CITY OF BALTIMORE MEMO	
	Agency Name & Address	Baltimore City Fire Department 401 E. Fayette Street, Mezzanine		
	Subject	City Council Bill #22-0199 Firefighter Safety Act		

TO: The Honorable Nick J. Mosby, President
And All Members of the Baltimore City Council
City Hall, Room 408

DATE: May 9, 2022

City Council Bill 22-0199 seeks to establish certain operational approaches to risk assessments within the Baltimore City Fire Department (BCFD or the Department) and to require certain digital audio and video recording devices.

On January 24, 2022, Lt. Paul Butrim, Lt. Kelsey Sadler, and Firefighter Kenny Lacayo were tragically killed, while battling a fully engulfed fire in a vacant dwelling, when part of the building collapsed. In response to this event and as a part of the routine post incident practice, the Department has reviewed and updated its policies and procedures to ensure that best practices are followed. BCFD looks forward to the opportunity to discuss these policies and procedures with the Council.

Between 2002 - 2021, the BCFD has battled approximately 23,182 residential fires, 3,333 public facility fires, and 4,317 private facility fires; totaling approximately 1,500 per year. These fires can range from food burning on stove tops to blazes that require a response from multiple engine and truck companies. In that time frame, we have lost four members, including the three this year to active firefighting. BCFD is one of the busiest fire agencies in the United States and while each loss of life is a tragedy, we take our safety protocols seriously and work to ensure that for our members and the general public.

Under Section 7-3 of this bill, the Council is proposing a number of policies and procedures that are either already covered by those existing in our Manual of Procedure (MOP) or in conflict with state standards for public safety organizations. For example, the state standard for travel over the speed limit in an emergency is that the operator should exercise "due regard" and not a set number of miles per hour. The Department feels that codifying policies covered by our MOPs is not necessary and also doesn't give us the flexibility of being able to make changes that reflect best practices in a timely manner.

Much of what is covered by Section 7-3 is already covered by MOP 601 which outlines command responsibility related to the arrival and sequence of units and officers at the scene of a fire and establishes a framework for outlining activities and responsibilities assigned to command. As a result of the January 24th incident, MOP 601-6 was created to specifically address the unique operational issues related to vacant buildings. The Department is also working with other city agencies to better identify and document the condition of vacant buildings across the city.

Under section 7-4 of this bill, the Council is proposing audio and video recording devices. Unfortunately, this request is impractical for the Department both operationally and fiscally. Smoke and heat would render most footage unviewable and most cameras inoperable. We are prepared to require apparatus cameras be in operation at all times. Additionally, we are currently exploring technology that could potentially help us more accurately identify heat signatures within a structure because the existing technology does not allow us to pinpoint the exact location of a heat signature. Additionally, section 7-5 is already covered under our existing command structure.

Section 7-6 of this bill proposes that disciplinary action not be taken against any member of the Department who questions actions at the site of an emergency. This is not operationally sound. Should a member face discipline for any action or inaction at the time of an emergency, s/he would have the opportunity to articulate their concerns as a mitigating factor at their hearing, but refusing to act at the time of the emergency puts both members of the department and the public at risk during an active emergency event.

With regards to Section 7-7, which requests a yearly report on the BCFD risk management program, the Department would be willing to report on these when we update those plans, which tends to be every five years.

The Baltimore City Fire Department opposes passage of City Council Bill 22-0199.

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