

**CITY OF BALTIMORE
COUNCIL BILL 09-0157R
(Resolution)**

Introduced by: Councilmembers Clarke, Cole, Kraft, Middleton, Henry, Branch, Holton, Welch,
Conaway

Introduced and read first time: October 5, 2009

Assigned to: Public Safety and Health Committee

REFERRED TO THE FOLLOWING AGENCIES: Police Commissioner, Mayor's Office of Criminal
Justice

A RESOLUTION ENTITLED

1 A COUNCIL RESOLUTION concerning

2 **Informational Hearing - Baltimore Police Department -**
3 **Police Report Availability**

4 FOR the purpose of inviting the Baltimore Police Commissioner to report to the City Council on
5 the Police Department's procedures for responding to citizen police report requests.

6 **Recitals**

7 In addition to its vital role to combat crime in the City, the Baltimore Police Department
8 contributes to the public's welfare in numerous other ways, including responding to and
9 investigating automobile accidents. These other public safety roles are every bit as important to
10 the health and well-being of Baltimore's citizens as the Department's more heralded crime
11 fighting role.

12 As part of the Department's public safety role, police officers routinely produce reports on
13 minor crimes and incidents, such as traffic accidents, that summarize the Department's
14 investigation of these incidents. These reports are the definitive and often final word on what
15 actually occurred. As such, they are often vital documents for those involved in or harmed by
16 auto accidents and other incidents. The reports provide clarity about an incident, often establish
17 who is at fault, and are generally required in order for someone affected by an incident to file
18 any sort of claim with an insurance agency to recover on the loss.

19 However, many affected individuals have a very difficult time getting the copies of the
20 reports that they need. The Police Department's web page provides neither a thorough
21 explanation of the process for acquiring a police report nor a link to the form that the site claims
22 is required to begin the process. Those who attempt to acquire a police report in person often
23 have no more luck than those looking online. Many times citizens are given conflicting
24 information about when a report will be available, the process for requesting a report, and even
25 whether or not a report exists. Officers dealing with the public often seem unfamiliar with the
26 procedure for giving a report to a member of the public. Individuals looking to file insurance
27 claims have been told by the Department that reports must be filed within 24 hours and later told
28 that no reports can be released for periods ranging from 10 days to multiple weeks.

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

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1 This confusion and lack of response to citizen requests falls far short of what the people of
2 Baltimore are entitled to expect from their Police Department. Delays in insurance payments
3 caused by an inability to obtain a police report can lead to very real hardship for people harmed
4 by traffic accidents and other incidents.

5 Also, for many people an effort to acquire a police report may be a person's first significant
6 contact with the Police Department. Because the Department requires the support and
7 cooperation of Baltimore's citizens in order to function effectively, a poor response to this initial
8 contact represents a lost opportunity to create the kind of goodwill in the community that could
9 benefit police efforts in the long run. Instead, mishandling of these requests can create an
10 impression that the Department lacks competence or is not responsive to citizen needs, and that
11 can hamper future relations between the Department and the public.

12 It is important that the Department do a better job of responding to these citizen requests both
13 to improve community relations and to assist those trying to recover from harmful incidents to
14 do so as quickly as possible.

15 **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF BALTIMORE,** That the
16 Baltimore Police Commissioner is requested to report to the City Council on the Police
17 Department's procedures for handling citizen requests for police reports and to discuss what
18 measures can be taken to improve the Department's responsiveness to these requests.

19 **AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED,** That a copy of this Resolution be sent to the Mayor, the
20 Baltimore Police Commissioner, the Director of the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice, and the
21 Mayor's Legislative Liaison to the City Council.