



# BALTIMORE POLICE DEPARTMENT

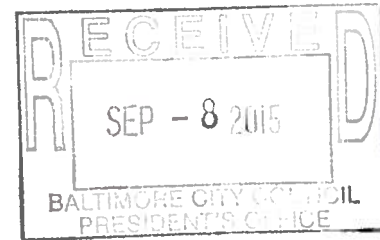


Stephanie Rawlings-Blake  
Mayor

Kevin Davis  
Interim Police Commissioner

September 4, 2015

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



*Attention: Natawna Austin, Executive Secretary*

**Re: City Council Bill No. 15-0239R  
Informational Hearing – Baltimore City’s Efforts to Make Homelessness a  
Rare and Brief Experience**

Dear Council President Young and Members of the City Council:

The Baltimore Police Department (BPD or the Department) has reviewed Council Bill 15-0239R and takes a **favorable** position on this legislation. This resolution calls on the BPD and other agencies to appear before the City Council to update it on efforts to make homelessness a rare and brief experience in Baltimore. The Department is favorable because we believe it is important to regularly engage with partner agencies regarding strategies to combat homelessness in Baltimore.

On any given night, Baltimore’s homeless population is estimated to be over 2,600 men, women, and children. The reasons for homelessness in Baltimore and across the country are varied and complex. Circumstances leading to homelessness include lack of affordable housing, lack of affordable health care, low income, and lack of comprehensive services. Additional factors contributing to homelessness include chronic illnesses, substance abuse, physical disability, and mental illness.

Historically, law enforcement has presented an additional hurdle to those experiencing homelessness. The homeless population is vulnerable to arrest and prosecution for CDS crimes as well as quality of life crimes such as loitering and solicitation. Unfortunately, such enforcement against homeless individuals does not address the underlying causes of homelessness. Instead, these practices only serve to exacerbate the issues leading to homelessness. When homeless individuals are arrested and prosecuted, they develop a criminal record which makes it more difficult to find employment and housing.

There is a philosophical shift underway in law enforcement which seeks to divert individuals into services instead of into the criminal justice system. Such approaches are often more cost effective than incarceration, and can provide individuals with the resources they need for treatment and recovery. The BPD has embraced this fundamental shift, and currently has a number of initiatives planned or underway which will help the Department address homelessness in a more productive manner.

- **Behavioral Emergency Services Team (BEST) Training:** BEST training is a certification course all police trainees receive prior to graduating from the Police Academy. BEST equips police officers with methods to properly interact with individuals with behavioral and/or mental health disorders. Officers learn to de-escalate mental health crises, minimize incidences of arrests, and

how to refer individuals to the City's various mental health crisis programs. Because many of the homeless population also experience mental health issues, this training is promoting a more effective law enforcement response to Baltimore's homeless population.

- Crisis Intervention Teams (CIT): Police departments around the country have launched CIT programs, which are collaborations between police and mental health professionals to help redirect individuals with mental illness from the criminal justice system to appropriate services in the health care system. Commissioner Davis instituted a CIT program as Chief of Police in Anne Arundel County and is planning to do the same in Baltimore. The Department is currently in the planning stages of implementation, including the identification of potential grant funding for the program. Additionally, the Department is currently formalizing a partnership with George Mason University that will partner police officers with mental health professionals on several "hot spot" streets throughout the City. Again, a CIT program will help connect homeless individuals experiencing mental health crises into services and treatment rather than arrest or to the emergency room.
- Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD): Cities such as Seattle and Santa Fe have recently piloted LEAD, a pre-booking diversion program developed to address low-level drug crimes. The program allows law enforcement officers to redirect low-level offenders engaged in drug activity into community-based services instead of jail and prosecution. A group of stakeholders has been meeting in Baltimore to discuss how and where LEAD can be piloted in Baltimore. It is anticipated that LEAD can have its greatest impact in areas that also have the highest concentrations of homeless individuals. When implemented, LEAD will present an option for homeless individuals to avoid the criminal justice system and instead receive community-based services.

As demonstrated by these initiatives, the Department is committed to pursuing innovative solutions to the homeless problem in Baltimore. Additionally, the Department is willing to collaborate with partner agencies such as the Mayor's Office of Human Services and the Health Department on other solutions and strategies to address homelessness.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this legislation. The Department looks forward to working with the City Council on this matter.

Sincerely,



Andrew Vetter  
Director, Government Affairs