



CITY OF BALTIMORE
MAYOR BRANDON M. SCOTT

TO	The Honorable President and Members of the Baltimore City Council
FROM	Chief James Wallace, Baltimore City Fire Chief, Baltimore City Fire Department
CC	Mayor's Office of Government Relations
DATE	March 13, 2025
SUBJECT	25-0018

POSITION: Support

BILL SYNOPSIS

This bill mandates that the Fire Chief, or their designated representative, establish an emergency scene during a fire or fire alarm. This designation grants the Chief or Designee the authority to control access to the area, including managing the movement of individuals and overseeing the properties in the vicinity of the fire. The goal is to ensure the safety of all individuals and to facilitate uninterrupted and safe fire operations.

SUMMARY OF POSITION

BCFD strongly supports this legislation. During active fires and other large emergency response events, there are often civilians who linger around the fire or the impacted properties. These individuals are not part of the emergency response effort nor are they there to provide support to the victims. While many of these individuals intent is not harmful, their presence poses significant risks, particularly when they do not follow directives of emergency responders.

Anyone present at the scene of a fire is at risk of injury. Having unnecessary individuals at the scene distracts and impedes critical operations and puts additional lives in danger. Fires are unpredictable, flames, smoke, and toxic gases present immediate hazards; structural collapses, explosions, or sudden changes in wind can cause a fire to escalate or spread rapidly. When first responders arrive, it is essential that they have the space needed to perform their duties and access vital equipment quickly to minimize loss of life and property and to keep themselves safe. Civilians gathering at the scene block fire trucks, obstruct access to emergency equipment, and prevent responders from efficiently addressing the emergency situation. Lastly, victims of fires are often in shock, and the presence of onlookers, offering questions or comments, does not provide the support they need to cope with the trauma they are facing.

This bill will allow BCFD to direct individuals who loiter at the scene of a fire to safer areas, ensuring that they remain at a safe distance and do not interfere with emergency operations. It will also hold individuals accountable for failing to comply with instructions to stay away from the scene, helping maintain a secure environment for both responders and victims. Ultimately, this legislation will enhance safety, improve operational efficiency during emergencies, and better support those affected by these critical events.

FISCAL IMPACT

This bill will not have a fiscal impact on BCFD.