



**SYNOPSIS**

**Committee: Health, Environment, and Technology**

**City Council Resolution: 21-0016R**

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**Investigative Hearing - Building Backups of Untreated Sewage**

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**Sponsor:** Councilmember Burnett, et al

**Introduced:** February 8, 2021

**Purpose:**

For the purpose of inviting representatives from the Department of Public Works, the Law Department, the Health Department, and the Mayor’s Office of Emergency Management to appear before the City Council to discuss the effectiveness and sufficiency of measures being taken to address basement backups of raw sewage in the City.

**Effective:** Upon enactment

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**AGENCY REPORTS**

Department of Health	
Department of Housing and Community Development	Favorable with Comments
Department of Public Works	
Department of Finance	
3-1-1 One Call and Dispatch Center (BCIT)	Comments
Mayor's Office of Emergency Management	
Mayor's Office of Performance and Innovation	Defers to DPW
City Solicitor	Favorable

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**ANALYSIS**

The resolution invites representatives from the Department of Public Works, the Law Department, the Health Department, and the Mayor’s Office of Emergency Management to appear before the City Council to discuss the effectiveness and sufficiency of measures being taken to address basement backups of raw sewage in the City.

Sewage backups have two primary causes: (1) Pipe blockages or failures; and (2) Stormwater and groundwater entering the sewer system during wet weather. Sewage backups into homes present serious health risks because of bacteria, viruses, and other pollutants that can contaminate property and cause disease. Sewage backing up into a building can also contact electrical wires potentially leading to electrocution. Cleaning up a sewage backup in a building is expensive and hazardous.

Property owners in Baltimore City who experience sewage backups caused by capacity-related wet weather events can recover up to \$5,000 for cleanup and disinfection costs through the Expedited Reimbursement Program administered by the Department of Public Works (DPW). DPW also offers direct cleanup services to residents through the Sewage Onsite Support (SOS) Cleanup Program.

The Expedited Reimbursement Program and SOS Program do not cover sewage backups that are not caused by the City's sewage collection system or that occur during dry weather. Additionally, the programs only cover cleanup and will not repair or replace damaged property. Residents can submit general liability claims to the Law Department for property damage and unreimbursed cleanup costs, but they must show that the backup was caused by the City.

DPW has made several changes to the Expedited Reimbursement Program in the last year. Those changes include removing the requirement to report backups through 311 within 24-hours, increasing the reimbursement cap from \$2,500 to \$5,000, and introducing the SOS Program to provide direct cleanup services to residents through contractors.

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### ***ADDITIONAL INFORMATION***


**Fiscal Note:** None

**Information Source(s):**

- DPW, Expedited Reimbursement Program for Sewage Backups: <https://publicworks.baltimorecity.gov/sewer-consent-decree/building-backups>;
- DPW, Sewage Onsite Support (SOS) Cleanup Program Brochure: [https://publicworks.baltimorecity.gov/sites/default/files/MCD\\_SOS\\_Brochure.pdf](https://publicworks.baltimorecity.gov/sites/default/files/MCD_SOS_Brochure.pdf);
- Law Department, General Liability Claims: <https://law.baltimorecity.gov/claims>;
- Reporting Agencies;
- Resolution 21-0016R.

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Analysis by:  
Analysis Date:

  
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March 22, 2021

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