



**BILL SYNOPSIS**

**Committee: Public Safety and Government Operations**

**Bill 21-0033R**

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**Investigative Hearing –  
Women in Public Safety: Leveling the Playing Field**

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*Sponsor: Councilmember McCray*

*Introduced: February 8, 2021*

**Purpose:**

For the purpose of requesting that the Chief of the Baltimore City Fire Department, the Commissioner of the Baltimore Police Department, and the Director of the Department of Human Resources come before the Baltimore City Council to provide information about their agencies' strategy to recruit, retain, mentor, and promote more women.

**Effective:** None

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**Agency Reports**

Law Department	Favorable
Department of Finance	Favorable
Police Department	
Fire Department	Favorable
Department of Human Resources	Favorable

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## Analysis

### Background

#### **Baltimore Police Department was established in 1853.**

- June 12, 1912 Mary Harvey and Margaret Eagleston were hired as the first two “Policewoman” in the history of the police department.
- In 1937 Violet Hill Whyte became the first African-American police officer to be hired by the police department.
- Also in 1937 the first four women were promoted to the rank of Sergeant. Sergeant Cronin, Lillie, Lynch and Ryan.
- On October 24, 1978 Patricia Mullen was promoted to the rank of Major and became the first woman appointed to the police departments executive staff, she was assigned to the Youth Section.
- In 1982, Kathy Adams became the first female member of the Baltimore Police Department’s Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) team.
- On January 15, 1983, Bessie Norris became the first female District Commander of the Southwestern District.
- In 2007, Deborah Owens became the first woman to be promoted to the rank of Deputy Commissioner in the history of the police department.

### Police Service

On September 2, 2020 The Crime Report published an article titled, *Why the Gender Gap in Policing is a Public Safety Crisis*. In the article they cited data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics that stated that female representation in the nation’s approximately 18,000 law enforcement agencies has remained stuck around 12 percent for more than 25 years. That number drops dramatically to 3 percent when it comes to women holding executive leadership positions.

A 2017 report by the Pew Research Center found that women are less likely to use excessive force, pull their weapons, and are less likely to view aggressive tactics as necessary. As a result, the National Center for Women & Policing reported that women police officers were less likely to be named in a lawsuit or a citizen complaint.

A lot of the problems that women face in the profession stem from the disproportionate barriers to recruitment, retention, and promotion. In order to correct these issues women must be represented at every level of the organization and have the power to impact policy. In the Baltimore Police Department, it was reported in a 2019 Baltimore Sun article that of the 2,500 sworn officers in the agency, less than 400, or 16% were women. At that time Commissioner Harrison stated that of the 30 uniformed officers on his command staff, 10 were women. Currently, the police department has 11 women serving on the command staff.

When women began their careers in police departments across the United States they were often segregated into gendered roles focusing on social service or they filled clerical positions. With the passage of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, women’s participation in the profession expanded, but the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission noted, “Once employers could no longer segregate women into peripheral jobs, they began using screening tests for public safety occupations.” Physical Agility Test (PAT) have long been a major barrier for women attempting to enter the

profession. PAT policies overemphasize upper body strength, which may discourage female applicants.

Research has shown that women are right to be concerned about PAT, because they fail police fitness tests at higher rates than men, though the validity of many PAT programs are in question. Throughout the years, courts have consistently ruled that PAT that produce disparities on the basis of gender are unlawful, unless they have been validated as bona fide work requirements. Overemphasis on physical strength in police academies, without validation as a bona fide occupational qualification, runs afoul of the EEOC and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act. Despite these laws being put in place to guard against the disparate impact that these PAT have on women, many of the 18,000 law enforcement agencies in the United States continue to rely on PAT without validation of the tests' alignment with work requirements.

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### **Additional Information**

**Fiscal Note:** Not Available

**Information Source(s):** Agency Reports; Police Chief Magazine – Women in Policing; Women's Leadership Academy PD; The Crime Report – Why the Gender Gap in Policing is a Public Safety Crisis; The Baltimore Sun;

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