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# CITY OF BALTIMORE

Brandon M. Scott – Mayor  
Zeke Cohen – Council President



## Office of Council Services

Nancy Mead – Director  
100 Holliday Street, Room 415  
Baltimore, MD 21202

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## COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

### The Honorable Council President Zeke Cohen

#### CHAIR

### HEARING NOTES

*LO25-0026*  
*Crisis Response*

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**Hearing Date:** 1/15/2026  
**Hearing Start Time:** 5:30 PM  
**Hearing End Time:** 8:00 XM  
**Location:** Du Burns Council Chamber / Webex  
**Total Estimated Attendance:** 45

#### Committee Members in Attendance:

- **Council President** Zeke Cohen
  - Paris Gray
  - Jermaine Jones
  - Odette Ramos
  - Zac Blanchard
  - **Council Vice President** Sharon Green Middleton
  - Phylicia Porter
  - Mark Parker
  - Mark Conway
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#### ***MAJOR SPEAKERS***

*(This is NOT an attendance record.)*

- Sara Whaley – Director, Mayor’s Office of Overdose Response
  - Melissa Buckley – Associate Professor of Social Work, Coppin State University
  - Fareeha Waheed – Chair, Trauma-Informed Care Task Force
  - Andrew Dameron – Director, City of Denver 911
  - Crista Taylor – President & CEO, Behavioral Health System Baltimore
  - Tahir Duckett – Executive Director, Center for Community Innovations in Community Safety, Georgetown Law
  - Patrice Andrews – Chief, Durham Police Department
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#### ***NOTES***

- Council President Cohen began the hearing with opening remarks
  - Thanked Councilmembers, administration representatives, and witnesses for their attendance this evening
  - Baltimore has seen a dramatic reduction in violence over the prior calendar year
    - The city is a leader in using public health to cure violence
  - The city has more work

- Over the summer several individuals were killed during mental health crises involving the police
  - We ask our officers to do too much outside of their scope
    - Cops are not clinicians and we should not expect them to be
  - We deserve a comprehensive, coordinated, community safety response system
  - Our 911 to 988 response system was designed to be limited in scope
    - Even with this scope we don't have enough responders, response times are lengthy
  - BHSB provided two recommendations after the last hearing
    - Fund initiative to encourage social work students to enter community-based response field
    - Create city-wide civilian emergency response system
      - "Community Safety Responders"
        - Could deploy quickly and respond to 911 calls that don't involve violence or a weapon
    - Denver and Durham show that armed police do not always need to be responders, at least not the only responders
  - People across the country have seen what we have done to reduce violence, this is our moment to be bold and innovative
    - To meet people where they are with care and compassion
- Director Whaley shared a presentation from the administration
  - As of July, her office has been working to overhaul the City's behavioral health system
  - Consent Decree
    - After death of Freddie Gray, City entered into with Department of Justice
    - Behavioral Health Collaborative was convened to carry out work
  - What was built
    - 911 diversion
    - 988 helpline
    - Crisis intervention training
    - Mobile crisis expansion
    - Open access project
    - Housing, outreach, connection
    - Quality improvement
  - 24/7 Comprehensive Safety Net
    - Triage
    - Telephone
    - GO
    - Health hubs
    - Continuity team
  - Sustainability
    - Workforce development
      - Peer delivery
    - Behavioral health workforce
      - Continue advocacy
- Crista Taylor shared BHSB's presentation
  - Principles for System Infrastructure Development
    - Help anywhere, anytime

- Community-based in prioritized
    - Least police responsible but coordination is critical
    - Variety of services needed
    - Public engagement also essential
  - Current infrastructure
  - Civilian Response Services
    - Alternative to law enforcement and fire/EMS response
    - Immediate, low-risk
  - Civilian response could be deployed by 911
    - Starts with commitment and partnership
    - Build from existing services
- Tahir Duckett
  - Partner with jurisdictions on alternative response infrastructure
  - Up until the 1960s emergency response was dramatically different
    - Ambulance services became discrete during civil rights protests in Pittsburg
  - Much of what we take advantage of is very new and rapidly changing
  - Baltimore residents' emergency response needs
    - Mental health
    - Poverty
    - Substance use
    - Low-level conflict
  - Mobile crisis teams are typically not optimized or scaled for
    - But is a significant chunk of what we task police officers to handle
    - Likely 10s of thousands in jurisdictions like Baltimore
      - Reflective of 2024 Baltimore 911 data
  - Police only take reports in about 8% of disorderly calls
  - Successful program examples
    - Direct dispatch from 911
    - Sufficient scale to respond
    - Prioritize community response
      - Co-response option
  - Different approaches
    - Structural decisions
    - Priority call types
    - Scope of follow-up/case management
- Patrice Andrews
  - HEART began in Durham in 2021
    - How many calls actually need law enforcement response
  - Determined there was plenty of work to go around
  - Arranged for transparent sessions between officers and those setting up the new system
  - Officers were relieved to know that this was not an effort to replace police
    - This was meant to recognize and address the fact that officers are not equipped to respond to every call
  - Conducted weekly debriefs between co-response teams
    - Officers to clinicians to discuss what was going well and not going well
    - Then discuss solutions

- Determined what calls needed to be diverted and those that shouldn't be
- Community response teams
- Also recently created involuntary commitment response team
- Clinicians have nearly the exact same equipment, except for guns, tasers, badges, etc.
- Council President Cohen noted that such an approach needs a city-wide consensus
- Andrew Dameron
  - Began co-response program in 2016
  - Got lots of community voices asking for non-law enforcement community response
  - Clinicians were also frequently indicating they could handle many programs on their own
  - These efforts are the next evolution of 911 systems
  - Denver approach is to view STAR as the 4<sup>th</sup> field response option available to dispatchers
    - Every call that comes through Denver 911 is handled the same way at the outset
      - There is a list of 10 call types that are eligible for STAR, so long as there are not other mitigating factors on the scene
    - Endeavor to prioritize the dispatch of STAR – STAR is intended to be the default responder until it needs to be ESCALATED to another responder
  - Need a dedicated dispatch system to ensure STAR is sent to as many calls as possible but also that there are adequate resources
  - What about after dispatch to ensure there isn't a subsequent 911 call?
    - Partner with community nonprofits for wrap around services post-call
- Melissa Buckley, Chair and Associate Professor for Dept. of Social Work at Coppin State University
  - Strong support of community centered crisis response system that encourages the right response at the right time by the right professionals
  - Clear statement that healing, prevention, and equity must guide those in crisis
  - Recommendation to offer loan repayment program to attract social workers would be incredibly valuable
  - Community based civilian response is more effective and appropriate
  - Baltimore, Maryland, and the nation have a shortage of mental health professionals
  - Next generation of social workers are already serving Baltimore while completing their degrees
  - Loan repayment and residency-style programs would significantly assist with retaining emerging professionals
- Fareeha Waheed, Chair of Trauma Informed Care Task Force
  - Baltimore lacks crisis response that meets people with care, dignity, and the right kind of help at the right moments
  - Encountered a moment where that system failed
  - Met first responder who escalated fear
    - What should have been support felt punitive
  - First responders do extraordinary work but there are structural failures
    - We are asking systems to address circumstances they were never meant to address
  - Our city has unique needs and any system should be co-designed with residents and first responders
    - Invest in pilots AND sustainable ecosystems
  - Urge administration to commit meaningful investment to expand crisis response capacity and urge council to continue exercise oversight and treat the current gaps like a priority

- Questions
  - CM Jones
    - What has been the most important factors in building trust between police and community safety department
    - Chief Andrews
      - High degree of collaboration
    - How long to build
      - About two years
  - CM Ramos
    - Do we need to start over to get to systems like those in Durham and Denver?
    - BHSB
      - Not starting over, build from – there is core infrastructure
      - Add nonclinician response to a broad variety of calls and reserve clinician for those truly necessary calls
    - Whaley
      - We have teams that can be dispatched in the City
      - We do not currently have an alterative response team
    - We are not seeing the responses that have been suggested are already happening
    - We need to know costs and partnerships necessary
  - President Cohen
    - We have experienced a system that is fragmented and lacks capacity to respond
    - Must acknowledge that we are a ways away from the systems present in Durham and Denver
    - “When I call 911, there should be a peer or clinician that can meet the need I have”
    - The level of intentionality from Durham and Denver on integration between police and nonpolice response is what we need here in Baltimore
    - Grateful to the administration for its partnership
  - CM Blanchard
    - How do built out systems impact the demand for staffing in patrol divisions
    - Chief Andrews
      - Seen some reduction in staffing on low level calls
      - More broadly, the demand for the HEART services has grown exponentially
        - Not yet in 24/7 model but moving in that direction
    - Repeat callers may be getting solutions that allow them to avoid further repeats
    - Duckett
      - BOCARBA study in 2025 showed that HEART resulted in significant reductions in response times
    - Dameron
      - Recently completed Denver study
      - Those receiving a STAR clinical encounter are less likely to see a police response in the following year than those who encounter police at the outset
    - Would like to follow up on Denver data
  - CM Parker
    - 2024 study – STAR is entirely co-responder model, not yet a peer model
    - In 2023, 20% of STAR eligible were responded to by a STAR team

- Dameron – remains unchanged
  - Of all 911 calls, what percent are eligible
    - Dameron – 15,000 calls identified in 2025, of 1.3 million
    - Andrews – community safety dashboard for Durham provides live data
    - Duckett – average 911 each month is 21,000, STAR responds to 1,100
  - How quickly can teams be deployed
    - Dameron - Response time has not been a priority to give teams the time to stay on scene as necessary
      - Did not want to create an environment where teams are flying from one to the next
    - Andrews – 39,325 since 2021, 6.5 minutes to scene
      - Typically remain on scene 30 minutes
- CM Conway
  - Urgency to get this right is high
  - Talk about how low acuity calls will decline
- VP Middleton
  - Trauma is frequent in Park Heights
  - Remember in first campaign being 30 seconds from a shooting in a liquor store
  - Since then, there has been a marked improvement in that neighborhood, much credit to the current mayor
  - Important that we all understand and acknowledge gaps
  - Baltimore is very unique but we can learn from these peer jurisdictions
- CM Porter
  - Mental health wellness checks are not fully utilized, how have you conferred with state level partners to expand that program
    - BHSB – a mental health wellness check goes through 911 and police
      - Some could be reimbursed through public behavioral health system
      - We do not need additional legislation to obtain that reimbursement
      - Work with MD Department of Health, including mobile crisis response services
        - Wellness checks are now a billable service
        - Need continued advocacy around the reimbursement rate, must match level of service
  - On DHCD involvement – calls come from communities as nuisance, how do we make those connections in the city
    - Calls come as 911 and 311
      - 311 calls are shared with relevant agency
      - Interagency collaboration is improving
- CM Bullock
  - Social workers are incredibly important to the ecosystem
  - What barriers are preventing social workers from entering this space
  - Buckley – safety
    - Critical to have the right type of response
    - Compensation

- Bachelor's of Social Work graduates are not compensated according to their skillset
  - Clear pathways
    - Who are the individuals able to step into a role
    - Are licensures required
  - Large role for social workers, particularly Coppin
    - Incidents have happened in West Baltimore and your students are more familiar with that community
  - Are there existing partnerships getting people into the pipeline
    - There are but scholars may be better suited to address that question
- CP Cohen
  - Should Baltimore's system be comprehensive or can it be done in a pilot or piecemeal manner?
  - Duckett
    - Very few programs are where they started, even those that started with a broad initial approach
    - Where you SHOULD start is really a political decision
      - How committed are you to making it work
    - There can be benefits to starting narrow
      - You can examine the first and second year
  - Dameron
    - Began with a single police district to prove concept
    - Expanded city-wide and are working towards 24/7
  - Andrews
    - Also started in a small geographic area
    - Important to evaluate the need and how far you can stretch a program
- CM Blanchard
  - What budgetary needs to having calls properly routed and what response time are we aiming for
  - Administration – will get back on that
- CM Parker
  - How do we equip 911 operators to triage these calls and appropriately categorize types of calls
  - On STAR – it is the starting point
    - Dameron – we are working towards STAR being the default
      - Slow adoption that occurs among law enforcement partners
  - Duckett
    - Law enforcement is an important part of the conversation
      - Some calls will be dispatched
      - Do they then say that STAR/HEART needs to come
    - Acclimatize call takers to the other end of the dispatch
      - What actually happens with calls
  - Whaley
    - Diversion work we are currently doing do resemble groups involving embedded clinician, police, and dispatchers

- CM Jones
  - Thanks those here for their support and help in identifying steps to move in the right direction
  - Well positioned in the city to do better
- CM Ramos
  - On calls regarding individuals experiencing homelessness
  - What are the scenarios that we are trying to address
  - Whaley
    - The system should support the work that MOHS does
      - Not 24/7
  - Want to ensure that we are clear about what's happening because we are the point of contact for the public
  - What data is being collected on 911 diversions
    - what do those calls entail
- CP Cohen
  - A relatively small amount of calls are being diverted from 911 to 988
  - Whaley
    - Small number is eligible and even smaller eligible for full (vs. partial, co-response) diversion
- CP Cohen
  - Thank you all again for being here this evening
  - Great to see everyone working together to build the system that Baltimore deserves
  - Looking at best practices is important
  - We want to be best in class
  - We have the capacity to do so

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***FURTHER STUDY REQUESTED***

*COPY IN SPREADSHEET*

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<b>Hearing Packet in bill file?</b> -----	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A
<b>Attendance Sheet in bill file?</b> -----	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A
<b>Vote Record in bill file?</b> -----	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A
<b>Agency reports read?</b> -----	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A
<b>Hearing televised or audio-digitally recorded?</b> -----	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A
<b>Certification of advertising/posting notices in the bill file?</b> -----	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A
<b>Evidence of notification to property owners in bill file?</b> -----	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A

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Notes by: Ethan Navarre  
 Notes Date: 1/15/2026

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