



HEARING NOTES

Bill: LO23-0041

Legislative Oversight Baltimore City Fire Department Operations

Committee: Public Safety and Government Operations

Chaired by: Mark Conway

Hearing Date: September 20, 2023

Time (Beginning): 1:00 PM

Time (Ending): 4:05 PM

Location: Du Burns Council Chamber / Webex Virtual Hearing

Total Attendance: Approximately 35 people

Committee Members in Attendance:

Mark Conway Kristerfer Burnett Zeke Cohen
Odette Ramos Phylicia Porter Eric Costello

Bill Synopsis in the file?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A
Attendance sheet in the file?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A
Agency reports read?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A
Hearing televised or audio-digitally recorded?.....	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A
Certification of advertising/posting notices in the file?.....	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A
Evidence of notification to property owners?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A
Final vote taken at this hearing?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A

Major Speakers

(This is not an attendance record.)

- James Wallace – Acting Fire Chief BCFD*
- Dante Stewart – Asst Chief BCFD - Operations*
- Thomas Tosh – Asst Chief BCFD – Safety and Member Services*
- Christopher Caisse – Asst Chief BCFD Support Services and Community Risk Reduction*
- Kensington White – Executive Assistant Chief BCFD*
- Laura Shiloh – Deputy Chief Training and Education*
- Carl Knight – Deputy Chief Safety and Risk Management*
- Jamarr Rayne – Director of Human Resources*
- James Fischer – Director of Finance*

Major Issues Discussed

1. Chairman Conway called the hearing to order, read the bill for LO21-0015 & LO23-0041, and introduced the committee members in attendance.
2. Chief Wallace and Command Staff began a presentation on Fire Department operations (presentation in the file) and responded to committee member questions. Topics included:
 - a. Fire deaths year to year
 - i. 8 in 2022 – 16 in 2023
 - b. Arson in vacant buildings
 - i. This is happening – but goes down once the building is labeled code x¹ and boarded up.
 - c. Proactively ID homes without power for support to prevent fire deaths in the winter.
 - d. Current status of the fleet:
 - i. Supply is very limited not only vehicles but parts as well.
 - ii. DGS is down 30 mechanics.
 - iii. Looking to stock parts to help alleviate wait times.
 - e. How long does it take 911 dispatch to pick up a call:
 - i. The goal is 15 seconds but Baltimore is not currently in compliance with this and has not been for much of the summer.
 - ii. Dispatch staffing is very low and the system is over-utilized.
 1. Calls that could be going to other resources like 988 are first going to 911.
 - iii. Life over property is the guiding principle of dispatch triage.
 - f. What is the center like – how are calls triaged and elevated to departments?
 - i. There are no barriers in the call center and several agencies are on the floor.
 - ii. A BPD sergeant and supervisor are always on the floor.
 - g. Nearly of BCFD injuries are at vacant properties – what do those injuries consist of?
 - i. Most are minor – injuries fall into 5 categories:
 1. Overexertion (most common)
 2. Burns
 3. Needle Sticks
 4. Lacerations and contusions
 5. Exposures
 - h. Workday Pay issues
 - i. There are still workday issues – but pay issues are being resolved.
 - ii. Other issues include changes in staffing such as promotions or other changes.
 - i. Stricker Street Report Recommendations
 - i. BCFD is creating a priority list and subcommittees for the implementation of recommendations.
 - j. % of Apparatus out of service
 - i. Currently one truck is offline – it is being repaired and should resume service shortly.
 - k. Attrition rates for BCFD
 - i. Hard to estimate – currently the BCFD is running one fire academy and planning for another to help fill vacancies.

¹ Code X is a designation that a structure is not safe to fight a fire in internally.

- ii. There are rumors of a “mass exodus” due to the number of members reaching retirement.
 - iii. Recruiting efforts especially with EMS are hampered by other municipalities offering better pay in less utilized departments.
3. Chairman Conway recessed the hearing.

Further Study

Was further study requested?

Yes **No**

If yes, describe.

- 1. Breakdown on fires in vacant properties – arson vs. accidental
- 2. Report on Stricker Street recommendations, their implementations, and progress on next steps.
- 3. Follow up with BCIT to support BCFD on workday issues.

Committee Vote:

M. Conway:

K. Burnett:

Z. Cohen:

E. Costello:

A. Glover:

P. Porter:

O. Ramos:

Tony Leva,
Committee Staff

Date: May 18, 2023

Cc: Bill File
OCS Chrono File