



BALTIMORE POLICE DEPARTMENT



BERNARD C. "JACK" YOUNG
Mayor

MICHAEL S. HARRISON
Police Commissioner

November 23, 2020

Honorable President and Members of the Baltimore City Council
Room 400, City Hall
100 N. Holliday Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21202

**RE: City Council Resolution 20-0189R
Informational Hearing – Overdose Prevention Sites**

Dear Council President Scott and Members of the City Council:

The Baltimore Police Department (BPD) has reviewed Council Bill #20-0189R which is for the purpose of inviting representatives from the Health Department, the Baltimore Police Department, the Fire Department, the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice, and the Law Department to provide information about overdose prevention sites and how they could be established in Baltimore City.

BPD takes no official position on City Council Resolution #20-0189R or whether or not overdose prevention sites should be established within Baltimore City. We would, however, like to raise a few points:

The effective management of overdose prevention sites presents an opportunity to address a growing equity issue in Baltimore. Accidental overdose deaths represent a growing problem in Maryland with mortality rates rising from 5 persons per 100,000 persons in 2011 to over 30 per 100,000 in 2018. ([Kaiser Family Foundation](#)). This resulted in over 2,000 lives lost that year. ([Md. Dept. of Health](#)) The rate of overdose deaths is increasing among non-Hispanic Black residents much faster than in other groups, while white residents experienced significantly higher rates of overdose deaths overall in 2018. (Id.).

The effective implementation of overdose prevention sites in Baltimore City is likely to reduce overall rates and disparities in accidental overdose deaths as has been experienced at the overdose prevention sites in Victoria, Canada. ([Pauly, B. et al. 2020](#)). However, it is important to note that the sites cannot address the root causes and the devastating effects of unsafe drug consumption alone. The sites would have to be paired with a significant investment in drug treatment and other social and medical interventions.

In addition, establishing overdose prevention sites may introduce or exacerbate community level disparities if the challenges surrounding the sites are not adequately addressed. Where the sites are located, how the communities in which they are situated are engaged in the planning and evaluation of such sites are important questions to be answered.

BPD stands ready to support a decision to establish overdose prevention sites but would need sufficient time to develop appropriate policies and trainings to ensure that officers are equipped to address real and perceived crime as well as other public safety issues in and around the sites. If there is a desire to move forward, we would suggest establishing a work group comprised of community leaders and the agencies listed in the resolution to create necessary protocols to ensure the safety of the users of the site and mitigate any harm to the surrounding community.

As mentioned above, the BPD takes no position on City Council Resolution #20-0189R but does look forward to participating in a robust conversation during the hearing.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michelle Wirzberger". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Michelle Wirzberger, Esq.
Director of Government Affairs

cc: Natwana Austin, Executive Secretary of the Baltimore City Council
Dominic McAlily, Legislative Assistant, Office of the Council President
Matt Stegmand, Mayor's Legislative Liaison
Michael Sullivan, Deputy Commissioner
Eric Melancon, BPD Chief of Staff
Andrew Smullian, BPD Deputy Chief of Staff
Bill Joyner, BPD Equity Officer