

CITY OF BALTIMORE
COUNCIL BILL 21-0017R
(First Reader)

Introduced by: Councilmember Burnett, Porter, Middleton, Bullock, Cohen, Stokes

Introduced and read first time: February 8, 2021

Assigned to: Public Safety and Government Operations

REFERRED TO THE FOLLOWING AGENCIES: Fire Department, Police Department, State's Attorney, Department of Health, Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice, Baltimore City Public School System, Mayor's Office of Homeless Services, City Solicitor, Department of Housing and Community Development, Department of Finance, Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement

A RESOLUTION ENTITLED

1 A COUNCIL RESOLUTION concerning

2 **Investigative Hearing – Arson and Fire Fatality Awareness:**
3 **Re-instituting the Baltimore City Joint Agency Arson Task Force**

4 FOR the purpose of inviting representatives from the Baltimore City Fire Department, the
5 Baltimore Police Department, the Office of the State's Attorney for Baltimore City, the
6 Baltimore City Health Department, the Baltimore City Department of Housing and
7 Community Development, the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice, the Baltimore City Public
8 School System, and the Mayor's Office of Homeless Services to appear before the City
9 Council to discuss arsons, fire fatalities and injuries, and school fires; how we can work to
10 re-institute the Joint Agency Arson Task Force; and discuss other tools that would assist in
11 the prevention or prosecution of arson.

12 **Recitals**

13 Baltimore City ended 2020 with 7 fire fatalities, the lowest number of fire related deaths in
14 the history of the Baltimore City Fire Department. Despite this historic milestone, the Baltimore
15 City Fire Department closed out the decade with over 2,400 cases of arson, 185 fire fatalities, and
16 250 school fires. By any measure, Baltimore City has a fire problem.

17 Arsons endanger the lives of citizens, who are often innocent bystanders of these acts, and
18 Fire Department personnel who are called on to respond to these incidents. Arson destroys more
19 than buildings; it can devastate a community resulting in the decline of economic development,
20 increased insurance premiums, financial hardships for people already living on fixed incomes,
21 loss of business revenue, and a decrease in property values. Some of the reasons why people
22 commit arson are to conceal other violent crimes, fraud, vandalism, and pyromania.

23 Acknowledging the catastrophic toll that arson takes on the wellbeing of our communities,
24 the City Council would like a briefing on what systems are in place to ensure that there is a
25 coordinated investigation between the Baltimore City Fire Department, the Baltimore Police
26 Department, and the Office of the State's Attorney. Moreover, the discussion should include a
27 frank assessment of the Baltimore City Fire Department's and Baltimore Police Department's
28 arson units staffing and average caseload per investigator and whether we have the correct
29 number of personnel assigned to keep pace with the high number of arson investigations that

EXPLANATION: CAPITALS indicate matter added to existing law.
[Brackets] indicate matter deleted from existing law.

Council Bill 21-0017R

1 occur in the City. Finally, the Fire Department should be prepared to brief the Council on
2 detailed statistical data on the total number of arsons that have occurred in each of the last five
3 years, segmented by what property set on fire, and what the clearance rate was for that crime each
4 year.

5 Using this information, we as a City government can begin the process of developing
6 a coordinated plan to implement proven policies such as a Joint Agency Arson Task Force or a
7 Community Arson Watch Program that would lead to significant declines and arson across the
8 City.

9 **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF BALTIMORE,** That the
10 Council invites representatives from the Baltimore City Fire Department, the Baltimore Police
11 Department, the Office of the State’s Attorney for Baltimore City, the Baltimore City Health
12 Department, the Baltimore City Department of Housing and Community Development, the
13 Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice, the Baltimore City Public School System, and the Mayor’s
14 Office of Homeless Services to appear before the City Council to discuss arsons, fire fatalities
15 and injuries, and school fires; how we can work to re-institute the Joint Agency Arson Task
16 Force; and discuss other policies that would assist in the prevention or prosecution of arson.

17 **AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED,** That a copy of this Resolution be sent to the Mayor, the
18 Chief of the Baltimore City Fire Department, the Baltimore City Police Commissioner, the
19 State’s Attorney for Baltimore City, the Commissioner of the Baltimore City Health Department,
20 the Commissioner of the Baltimore City Department of Housing and Community Development,
21 the Director of the Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice, the Chief Executive Office of the
22 Baltimore City Public School System, the Director of the Mayor’s Office of Homeless Services,
23 and the Mayor's Legislative Liaison to the City Council.