



Legislation Text

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INTRODUCTORY*

CITY OF BALTIMORE
COUNCIL BILL R
(Resolution)

Introduced by: Councilmember Conaway

A RESOLUTION ENTITLED

A COUNCIL RESOLUTION concerning
Investigative Hearing - Police/Civilian Interactions - Transparency

FOR the purpose of requesting the Police Commissioner to report to the City Council on the current policy for the documentation and release of information regarding incidents in which there have been confrontations between police officers and civilians resulting in any physical contact.

Recitals

Early last year the City Council adopted a resolution expressing concern over the announcement by Baltimore police officials that the names of police officers who killed or injured citizens in the line of duty would no longer be released, changing a long-standing practice that law enforcement personnel contended put officers at risk and exposed officers to retaliation from disgruntled members of the public.

The change in policy met with opposition by some local elected officials and community activists because it did not further a policy of transparent government, facilitate good police/community relations, support the public's right to know about possible "problem" officers, or do anything to encourage communities to work with police to solve crimes and overcome a "Stop-Snitching" mentality.

At the hearing, the Police Commissioner informed the Council that the policy governing the release of names of police involved in incidents that resulted in the death or injury of civilians had been modified. All pertinent information would be released without the name of the officer involved. After internal review, the names of officers found to be at fault would be released, and the names of those exonerated would be disclosed at the discretion of the Commissioner.

Recent events surrounding the serious injury to a prominent member of the black community at the hands of law enforcement call into question the efficacy of the current policy - even with modifications. The Christmas-week arrest and injury of an elderly steward of the community known as the "Mayor of Poppleton" resulted in public demonstrations and outcry for full disclosure.

A 73-year old man who has barbered the hair of countless politicians and prominent Baltimoreans since 1974, and

who has mentored inner city single mothers, and counseled middle-school boys for most of his adult life, was, in his words, ‘stopped for no reason, thrown to the ground, had a foot put to the back of his neck, his arm broken in 2 places, and then placed in handcuffs, an incident that followed the arrest earlier in the month of another community leader across town.

In the other incident, occurring in the first week of December, the Union Square Community Association president was arrested after he called police to investigate the alleged sexual assaults of 2 girls who had sought his assistance. The media reported that police said the man interfered with the investigation; the man arrested said the arrest took place after he simply asked the police a question.

Both of these police-involved incidents gave rise to public demonstrations because those involved were “pillars” of the community. There were no demonstrations nor calls for an accounting from the officers involved in the other 20-odd police involved shootings of 2009 - not even in the cases of the 7 people who died.

It is time for the police to present a uniform, consistent, fair, and transparent policy in the dissemination of information surrounding police/civilian encounters that result in injury to either party, regardless of the prominence of the victim or the discomfiture of the officer.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF BALTIMORE, That the Police Commissioner is requested to report to the City Council on the current policy for the documentation and release of information regarding incidents in which there have been confrontations between police officers and civilians resulting in any physical contact.

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution be sent to the Mayor; the Police Commissioner; the Honorable Members of the Baltimore City Senate and House Delegations to the Maryland General Assembly; the President of the Baltimore NAACP; the President and Members of Ashburton Area, Ash-East Arlington, Auchentoroly, Robert Coleman, Charles Village Community, Coppin Heights Community, Fulton Heights; GMCC, Hampden; Hanlon Park, Matthew Henson, Mondawmin, Panyway, Park Circle Improvement, Penn North, Remington, Woodbrook, Whittier Monroe, and Wyman Park Community Associations; and the Mayor’s Legislative Liaison to the City Council.

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