



Legislation Text

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INTRODUCTORY*

CITY OF BALTIMORE
COUNCIL BILL R
(Resolution)

Introduced by: President Rawlings-Blake

A RESOLUTION ENTITLED

A COUNCIL RESOLUTION concerning
Inter-Agency Training Initiative - Nuisance Crimes

FOR the purpose of requesting the Baltimore City State’s Attorney and the Baltimore City Police Commissioner, with the aid of area law schools and other legal resources, to cooperatively develop an inter-agency training program for police officers to insure that nuisance citations meet requisite legal standards to be upheld in court, and any other training needs of police personnel are addressed, in order to make certain that the enforcement of nuisance laws has the intended effect of preserving the quality of life of Baltimore City neighborhoods.

Recitals

“The Broken Window thesis propounded by criminologists states that human behavior is strongly influenced by symbols of order and disorder. If a neighborhood appears orderly, people feel safer, and wrongdoers are less likely to commit crimes. But one unrepaired broken window can signal that no one cares. Vandalism and antisocial behavior that go unresisted may send a neighborhood spiraling to its lowest common denominator, as citizens give in and give up.” Legally Speaking, October 1997.

In 2002, aware that quality of life crimes represent the majority of crimes that occur within the downtown area and “have a dramatic impact on the psychological well being of our residents, workers, and visitors”, the Downtown Partnership created the Downtown Court Watch Program to insure “the effective prosecution of these crimes” that is essential to the continued revitalization of downtown. Through the program, members of the business community attend District Court and testify in nuisance crime proceedings to ensure successful prosecution.

Later the same year, the Baltimore City State’s Attorney’s Office used a grant from the U.S. Justice Department to concentrate solely on nuisance crimes that included public urination, drunken and disorderly conduct, carrying open containers of alcohol, and prostitution. Prior to undertaking the initiative, the SAO’s held 9 “community prosecution forums” across the City to hear citizens’ concerns. It found that emphasis needed to be placed on the quality of life crimes that were mainly responsible for “driving people out of the City”.

Despite determining the importance of addressing quality of life issues in our communities and the concentrated efforts of prosecutors to adjudicate nuisance crimes, the number of arrests and the percentage of successful

prosecutions has constantly declined. For example, in 2006, of a total of 15,125 citations 10,676 (70%) were declined for prosecution. In 2007, of 11,100 citations, 7,422 (66%) were declined for prosecution. Recent data shows another even more alarming trend - police officers are arresting and serving a declining number of citations for nuisance crimes.

The quality of life in Baltimore City neighborhoods must be nurtured by ridding them of the nuisance crimes that threaten their well-being. Police and prosecutors must work hand and hand to aggressively address the “minor” offenses that threaten a neighborhood’s stability.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF BALTIMORE, That this Body respectfully requests the Baltimore City State’s Attorney and the Baltimore City Police Commissioner, with the aid of area law schools and other legal resources, to cooperatively develop an inter-agency training program for police officers to insure that nuisance citations meet requisite legal standards to be upheld in court, and that any other training needs of police personnel are addressed, in order to make certain that the enforcement of nuisance laws has the intended effect of preserving the quality of life of Baltimore City neighborhoods.

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That the State’s Attorney and the Police Commissioner are requested to seek the aid of the Deans of the University of Maryland School of Law and the University of Baltimore School of Law to develop a continuing education course for law enforcement personnel in the proper citing of nuisance crimes.

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution be sent to the Mayor, the Baltimore City State’s Attorney, the Baltimore City Police Commissioner, and the Mayor’s Legislative Liaison to the City Council.

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