



Legislation Text

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INTRODUCTORY*

CITY OF BALTIMORE
COUNCIL BILL R
(Resolution)

Introduced by: President Young, Councilmember Conaway

A RESOLUTION ENTITLED

A COUNCIL RESOLUTION concerning

Investigative Hearing - Baltimore City False Alarm Reduction Program

FOR the purpose of requesting the Police Commissioner, the Fire Chief, the Housing Commissioner, and the Director of Finance to assist the City Council in exploring the efficacy of the City's False Alarm Reduction Program in reducing the number and frequency of false alarms; in determining the number and monetary value of false alarm occurrence fees collected in the most recently completed collection period; in examining program administrators' responses to citizens' requests for information or assistance; and in assessing the legitimacy of permitting liens to be placed against residential properties for non- or late- payment of occurrence fees.

Recitals

City of Baltimore False Alarm Reduction Program: False Alarms Activations are a major public safety concern. The Baltimore City Police Department responded to more than 125,000 alarms in 2002. Ninety-eight percent of these alarms calls were false. False alarm activations require an enormous resource commitment by the police annually. False alarms are costly and dangerous because they divert police officers from true crime prevention and delay response to real emergencies.

The False Alarm Reduction program was established to register all burglar alarm systems in the City, track the occurrence of alarms, and administer a tiered system of false alarm occurrence fines that is be imposed on residents and businesses experiencing excessive false alarms. Baltimore Police officials hope that no one experiences a false alarm and provide 2 "free" responses to false activations in a 365-day period.

A false alarm is defined as any alarm signal that elicits a response by police personnel and for which there is no evidence of criminal activity to justify a police response. Simply put, if a police officer responds to an alarm signal and, after investigation, finds no evidence that criminal activity occurred or was occurring, the call will be designated a false alarm. Most false alarms are caused either by human error or equipment malfunction.

Beginning with the third and subsequent responses, users will be assessed a false alarm occurrence fee as follows:

3rd	\$ 50	11th	\$ 600
4th	\$100	12th Residential	\$ 700
5th	\$150	Commercial	\$2,000
6th	\$200	13th Residential	\$ 800
7th	\$250	Commercial	\$2,000
8th	\$300	14th and above	
9th	\$400	Residential	\$1,000
10th	\$500	Business	\$2,000

If the occurrence fee is not paid, a City lien, which is a charge upon the owner's real property for the satisfaction of debt arising by statute, can be placed against the residential or commercial property. Ultimately if the debt is not satisfied, the property is subject to the tax sale process. Additionally, failure to register an alarm may result in the issuance of environmental citations. Last year the City auctioned 12,689 homes and properties whose owners failed to pay local taxes and municipal bills, including false alarm fees - twice as many as in 2006, in the midst of Baltimore's housing boom. This year 10,839 properties were offered at tax sale. The increase in the last two years in properties being offered at tax sale reflects the downturn in the economy and the dire straights in which many Baltimore City residents find themselves.

While it is imperative that the City collect money owed, it is also important to ensure that Baltimore City property owners are treated fairly and compassionately in these trying times.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF BALTIMORE, That this Body hereby requests the Police Commissioner, the Fire Chief, the Housing Commissioner, and the Director of Finance to assist in exploring the efficacy of the City's False Alarm Reduction Program in reducing the number and frequency of false alarms; in determining the number and monetary value of false alarm occurrence fees collected in the most recently completed collection period; in examining program administrators' responses to citizens' requests for information or assistance; and in assessing the legitimacy of permitting liens to be placed against residential properties for non- or late- payment of occurrence fees.

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution be sent to the Mayor, the Police Commissioner, the Fire Chief, the Housing Commissioner, the Director of Finance, and the Mayor's Legislative Liaison to the City Council.

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