



City of Baltimore

City Council
City Hall, Room 408
100 North Holliday Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21202

Legislation Text

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INTRODUCTORY*

CITY OF BALTIMORE
COUNCIL BILL R
(Resolution)

Introduced by: Councilmembers Young, Holton

A RESOLUTION ENTITLED

A COUNCIL RESOLUTION concerning
Informational Hearing - Baltimore Police Commissioner - Policy Change

FOR the purpose of requesting the Baltimore Police Commissioner to brief the City Council on the change in policy that dictates that the names of police officers who kill or injure citizens will no longer be disclosed to the general public.

Recitals

Early January 2009, Baltimore police officials announced that the names of police officers who kill or injure citizens in the line of duty will no longer be released, changing a long-standing practice that law enforcement personnel reportedly believe puts officers at risk. Further, the new policy is in keeping with some other departments across the country and is designed to protect officers from retaliation, according to a departmental spokesman.

The new policy, while supported by the police union, was met with opposition by some elected officials and community activists as one that did not further a policy of transparent government, facilitate good police/community relations, support the public's right to know about possible problems with problem officers, or do anything to encourage communities to work with the police to solve crimes and overcome a "Stop-Snitching" culture.

The media reports that many Baltimore area law enforcement agencies report the names of officers involved in shootings - Anne Arundel County releases the information within 12 to 24 hours; Baltimore County police release information at the discretion of the media relations office; the Maryland State Police and Harford County Sheriff's Office make decisions on a case by case basis; Prince George's County waits 24 hours after a shooting, then publishes the information on the Department's Web site.

Other large cities across the country have varying public disclosure policies ranging from situational evaluation, to full disclosure including the names of officers working undercover. However in May 2008, the California Attorney General issued an opinion that the public generally has a right to know the names of police officers involved in critical incidents, including those involving lethal force.

The opinion held that at the heart of the issue is balancing the public's right to keep watch over the men and

women responsible for enforcing the law and the rights to privacy and security of the law enforcers themselves. The opinion recognizes that there are certain circumstances where the potential danger to the officer or to the crime fighting mission would outweigh the public's right to know the officer's identity.

Reportedly, Baltimore City Police shot 21 people in 2008, 13 of them fatally; 31 people were shot in 2007 - 13 of them fatally; and 15 people were shot in 2006 - 5 of them fatally. If police seek to engage the public in a full disclosure policy to counter the "Stop Snitching" culture that pervades Baltimore's neighborhoods, they might rethink a policy that does not allow full disclosure in return.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF BALTIMORE, That the Baltimore Police Commissioner is requested to brief the City Council on the change in policy that dictates that the names of police officers who kill or injure citizens will no longer be disclosed to the general public.

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution be sent to the Mayor, the Baltimore Police Commissioner, the President of the Baltimore Chapter of the NAACP, the groups listed in the Planning Department Director of Community Associations, and the Mayor's Legislative Liaison to the City Council.

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