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## **Good afternoon Honorable President and Members of the City Council,**

My name is Matthew Coster, and I am the proud President of Baltimore Firefighters IAFF Local 734. I stand before you today in strong opposition to Council Bill 25-0018.

This legislation, as written, fails to protect anyone operating on a fire scene or fire ground. In fact, it inadvertently causes harm—not only to our firefighters but to the very residents of Baltimore who have just experienced the devastating loss of a fire.

Let me be clear: this bill will *not* improve safety, accountability, or efficiency. What it *will* do is deny fire victims access to critical post-fire services such as fire mitigation, emergency cleanup, and board-up operations—services that are essential for preserving property, preventing further damage or theft, and maintaining insurance eligibility. These services must be delivered rapidly and at all hours of the day, a standard no city agency is currently equipped to meet.

The Fire Department's responsibility ends once the fire is extinguished. We do not, and cannot, properly secure a property. At best, we may apply plastic sheeting to broken windows or doors—temporary and ineffective measures that leave properties vulnerable. Proposing that another city agency handle board-ups—especially during late-night or weekend fires—is impractical and logistically unrealistic. Delays in securing properties can mean the difference between a

family recovering or losing everything they have left.

Mr. Will Karaberis, through Platinum Emergency Services, has been a vital partner in filling this critical void. His company operates with the utmost professionalism and respect for the fireground. I have personally witnessed his team working hand-in-hand with our incident commanders and firefighters to ensure the safety and security of fire scenes. Not once have his operations interfered with firefighting efforts or caused harm. On the contrary, his services have *reduced* the burden on our personnel and enhanced outcomes for fire victims.

Moreover, Mr. Karaberis has shown unwavering support for our department and our members. He has provided food and water at extended incidents, assisted families of fallen or injured firefighters, contributed to our Widows and Orphans Fund, and helped support a firefighter battling terminal cancer. He exemplifies the

community partnership we *should* be encouraging, not legislating out of existence.

This bill also fails to address the very real and growing danger posed by reckless motorists at emergency scenes. In recent years, multiple firefighters have been seriously injured or forced to retire after vehicles drove over supply lines or struck hydrant connections. Just last week, a firefighter was dragged to the ground and suffered a broken leg and head injury after a driver ran over an active hoseline during a hydrant connection.

If the intent of this legislation is truly safety, then it is misplaced. The focus should be on creating stronger protections for fire and EMS personnel from vehicular hazards, not eliminating the services of a company that has demonstrated nothing but integrity and compassion.

Council Bill 25-0018, in its current form, is not only ineffective but harmful. It offers no measurable safety benefit and strips away a vital

layer of support for fire victims and first responders. Worse, it threatens to shutter a local business that exemplifies exactly the kind of partnership and community-minded spirit we should be fostering in Baltimore.

For these reasons, I respectfully and urgently request that you give this bill an *unfavorable* report.

Thank you for your time and commitment to public safety.