

Baltimore City Sheriff's Office

Samuel Cogen, Sheriff

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TO: The Honorable Members of the House Judiciary Committee

FROM: Nicholas T.R. Blendy, Esq., Assistant Sheriff, Baltimore City Sheriff's Office

RE: House Bill 1034 – Baltimore City Sheriff – Staffing

DATE: February 27, 2024

POSITION: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS

Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Bartlett, and members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Sheriff's Office (BCSO) **supports with amendments** House Bill (HB) 1034.

HB 1034, if enacted, would effect three (3) changes to the section of the Courts and Judicial Proceedings statute that governs the Baltimore City Sheriff. Two of the changes will fulfill campaign promises that Sheriff Cogen made to the voters if they were to elect him to his current position; those are to increase managerial oversight in the office, and to humanize the evictions process. The third change is to provide hiring flexibility and the opportunity to seek additional funding sources. It is worth noting that this bill has no fiscal impact, as all of the positions being codified are already funded for in the current Fiscal Year 2024 Sheriff's Office budget and have been submitted for in the preliminary Fiscal Year 2025 Sheriff's Office budget proposal.

Regarding the first change, the two additional Assistant Sheriff positions provide managerial expertise in areas that previously have not existed in the BCSO. One of the Assistant Sheriff positions is responsible for oversight of the office's budget management and human resources to ensure personnel matters are handled effectively. The other Assistant Sheriff position serves as internal legal counsel for the office.

The second change to the statute involves codification of the social worker provision in the office. The social workers are critical staff for Sheriff Cogen's commitment to humanizing the evictions process, as they are tasked with connecting resources to tenants facing eviction as early in the process as possible. Since losing one's home is probably the most traumatic experience anyone can have short of losing one's liberty, the ability to intervene and connect a tenant to resources to either help stave off the eviction or to identify resources that can help a family after an eviction is effected is a key component to the BCSO's mission around its legal responsibility to carry out these orders of the Court. After conversations with the Baltimore City Administration (BCA), this provision will require a minor amendment to codify the number of social workers at two (2), which the Sheriff believes is a sufficient number to help make his vision in this area a reality.

The third change is a funding flexibility change. Because the BCSO is a State agency but is funded through the Mayor and City Council budget, there is sometimes a unique administrative delay in the addition of personnel to the BCSO. This provision is intended to streamline the process to authorize the Sheriff to make appointments when funding becomes available regardless of its source (e.g., grants, direct State aid, etc.). Much like the paragraph above, after conversations with the BCA, this provision will also require a minor technical amendment to clarify the language to ensure the intent—to provide BCSO appointment flexibility whenever funding is available—is phrased in such a way that is consistent with similar legal language dealing with other areas of the Mayor and City Council budgeting process.

For the foregoing reasons, the BCSO respectfully requests a **favorable with amendments** report on HB 1034.