



**Brandon M. Scott**  
Mayor

# BALTIMORE POLICE DEPARTMENT



**Richard J. Worley**  
Police Commissioner

February 22, 2026

TO: The Honorable Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Erin Murphy, Esq., Chief of Staff & Government Affairs, Baltimore Police Department

RE: Public Safety- State & Local Governments- Use of Unmanned Aircraft

DATE: February 24, 2026

**Position: OPPOSE**

Chair Bartlett, Vice Chair Davis, and members of the Committee: Please be advised that the Baltimore City Police Department opposes House Bill 0471.

For the past five years, BPD has worked diligently to integrate Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) into both the Crime Scene Unit and the SWAT Team. Throughout this process, the Department has collaborated closely with the Department of Justice Consent Decree Monitoring Team to ensure that all UAS policies and procedures are consistent with the principles of constitutional policing. Each policy governing the use of UAS has been reviewed and approved by the DOJ. All BPD drone pilots are certified by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), ensuring that every deployment is conducted in full compliance with regulations. In addition to regulatory compliance, our program emphasizes training, accountability, and transparency in every operation. UAS technology has made a profound impact on our department and has improved public safety in Baltimore.

As written, the passage of HB0471 would immediately and significantly impact the use of Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) in crime scene and accident investigation units across the State of Maryland. UAS technology is routinely utilized to capture aerial photographs of crime and crash scenes, allowing documentation to occur quickly, often within minutes of arrival. It also enhances first responder safety by enabling the documentation of hazardous scenes from a secure distance. However, as outlined, HB0471 would prohibit the use of UAS technology at crash and crime scenes unless a search warrant is obtained prior to deployment - even on public streets and interstates. This requirement would substantially delay deployment and, in many cases, effectively eliminate the practical use of UAS technology at scenes in Baltimore and throughout Maryland.

By restricting this technology, the bill would prevent law enforcement from using a proven, reliable tool that allows scenes to be documented more completely and in a fraction of the time required by traditional methods.

The efficiency, safety benefits, and overall quality of UAS documentation are what make this technology an essential asset for crime scene and accident investigation units across the nation and here in Baltimore. Limiting its use would negatively impact not only investigative documentation processes but also Maryland residents who depend on accurate and timely scene documentation for fair and equitable cases.

Further, UAS technology is more cost effective in comparison to the alternative method of capturing aerial photographs using helicopters. Not only is UAS deployment less expensive, but the technology also has several value-added benefits over images captured by helicopter pilots. UAS units can create two-dimensional maps and three-dimensional models in which critical measurements can be derived. The resulting products are true and accurate representations of the scene, taken at the time of event, providing a compelling visual for investigators and courts of law.

HB0471 will have an impact on more than just crime scene and accident investigation units. In its current iteration, this bill will limit public safety agencies across the state from deploying UAS technology for preventive measures, rescue missions and other public safety initiatives. For example, this technology is currently utilized by firefighters to assess fire progression, identify hot spots and coordinate firefighting efforts from a safe distance. Under this bill, firefighters would no longer be able to utilize UAS technology even if it was “necessary to prevent imminent serious bodily harm” as this bill specifically limits this approved usage to only law enforcement officers.

Emergency management operations are another example of where HB0471 will have a negative impact on public safety initiatives. Emergency management agencies utilize UAS technology to prepare for impending disasters, and in the aftermath, to assess damage and coordinate relief efforts. Without UAS technology, the efficiency of disaster prevention and assessment would be diminished and put first responders and residents at further risk. Under HB0471 the use of this technology by emergency management would be limited, if not eliminated.

A notable use case for UAS technology in recent memory was the Key Bridge Collapse. UAS technology was utilized at this incident by numerous state and federal agencies over multiple days to assess the extent of the damage and provide situational awareness of the location to rescue and recovery operators. It provided a viewpoint that was unmatched even from a helicopter whose ability to observe close range and lower altitude details is limited. Of note, this incident was quickly deemed a search and recovery mission which is a disapproved use under this bill.

In short, BPD believes that the language included in HB0471 negatively impacts the use of UAS technology by state and local government entities. It prevents UAS technology from being deployed and dismantles existing programs currently serving citizens and public safety agencies in Baltimore. It is crucial that new legislation is drafted with the input of experts currently studying and utilizing the technology in order to create regulations without unintended consequences.

Therefore, we urge you an unfavorable report on House Bill 471 as currently written.

