



STATEMENT ON PUBLIC SAFETY IN BALTIMORE AND SUPPORT FOR THE USE OF AERIAL SURVEILLANCE

Public safety is the top priority for the City of Baltimore. All crime, especially homicides and shootings, causes trauma and suffering to the families and communities plagued by these senseless acts of violence. Persistent violent crime rattles our city to its core, overshadowing its assets and positive attributes and diminishing its vibrancy and economic potential.

A comprehensive, data-driven strategy is essential to achieve sustained crime reduction. The Greater Baltimore Committee (GBC) Board of Directors is impressed and encouraged by the strategic vision outlined by Commissioner Michael S. Harrison in his Crime Reduction & Departmental Transformation Plan. The Commissioner's data-driven and evidence-based methodology to reduce crime is comprehensive and deserves universal support and full funding from federal, state and city governments as well as philanthropic and private sector entities, where appropriate, to ensure proper implementation. The GBC Board fully endorses Commissioner Harrison's crime reduction and police department transformation efforts and pledges to advocate for the funding requested.

The GBC also believes that the Baltimore Police Department should utilize all available tools and resources to bring down the unacceptable crime rate in the city. The Laura and John Arnold Foundation, a subsidiary of Arnold Ventures, has recently offered to fund a program to provide aerial surveillance technology for a period of three years, at no cost to the city. The program, known as the Community Support Program or sometimes referred to as Eye in the Sky, would provide an additional investigative tool that could be used by the police department to bring perpetrators of crime to justice.

While the use of aerial surveillance has proven useful in military and national security applications, it has not yet been used as a law enforcement tool in American cities.

Critics have objected to the technology as invasive of constitutional rights to privacy. While those concerns are worthy of consideration, the GBC Board does not believe that the application of the aerial surveillance technology serves as a threat to

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individual privacy any more than the daily utilization of cameras that are prevalent in our society today.

Others suggest that Baltimore should reject the program until it has been proven as an effective tool to support law enforcement activities elsewhere. The GBC disagrees with this position and points to the fact that *all* successful programs, tactics, or products must go through a “proof of concept” stage of initial implementation and evaluation.

Baltimore has a history of innovation and can proudly lay claim as a “City of Firsts” - a proving ground for new innovation and technologies that have positively impacted America and its citizens. The application of aerial surveillance to support law enforcement needs to be tested somewhere—why not Baltimore?

Given the current level of violent crime, it seems reasonable that a new technology that is being offered as an added public safety investigative tool at no cost to the city should be tried for the benefit of all citizens.

Should the Baltimore Police Department accept the program, it is incumbent that the funders provide the adequate resources to implement all aspects of the program. It is also imperative that the program is acceptable under the Consent Decree and does not impede Commissioner Michael Harrison’s day-to-day operations or detract from his strategic crime reduction plan.

The city needs every tool and resource available to break the cycle of violent crime. The adoption of aerial surveillance technology would be one component of a comprehensive effort, but it should not be viewed as a panacea or a singular driver of crime reduction.

The Greater Baltimore Committee Board of Directors urges the Baltimore Police Department to accept the aerial surveillance technology program offered by the Laura and John Arnold Foundation to test the application of this technology in urban crime fighting. This innovative approach to crime solving is a program that is deserving of support of the Mayor, Baltimore City Council, Baltimore Police Department and the residents of the city in the fight to reduce violent crime.

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