

**PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY COUNCIL**  
**COMMITTEE REPORT**  
**2025 Legislative Session**

Reference No.: CB-020-2025

Draft No.: 1

Committee: Health, Human Services, and Public Safety

Date: April 3, 2025

Action: FAV

**REPORT:**

Committee Vote: Favorable 4-0 (In favor Council Members: Blegay, Fisher, Olson, and Watson)

**REPORT:**

The Health, Human Services, and Public Safety Committee convened to consider CB-020-2025. Staff presented an overview of the bill, noting that it proposes amendments to the County's Fire Safety Code to increase applicable fire inspection fees. Additionally, it seeks to raise the civil fine for reckless endangerment involving a group of people. The bill's language focuses on fire prevention measures and regulations for dwellings, explicitly addressing the use, storage, and required safety equipment to mitigate fire hazards across the county.

Mr. Malcolm Moody, Legislative Budget and Policy Analyst presented the Policy Analysis and Fiscal Impact Statement, highlighting the proposed changes outlined in the bill. He mentioned increases in fire inspection fees and a proposed civil acceptable increase from \$5,000 to \$10,000. He noted a proposed change to the group size threshold for those considered at risk, lowering it from 100 to 50 people. Mr. Moody reviewed the top five fire calls for the 2024 calendar year. He emphasized that the automatic fire alarm was the highest call.

He indicated that the bill would have a favorable fiscal impact due to increased revenue from fees and fines and also mentioned the potential for a decrease in false alarms.

Sakinda Skinner, Council Liaison, Acting County Executive's Office, stated that they are seeking a favorable recommendation for CB-020-2025 and that Draft 2 had been withdrawn before the meeting following discussions about raising the fee to \$10,000 and thanked Mr. Maddox for identifying a state law exception that permits the increase – further citation details are pending.

She also noted that the Office of Law concurs with the legal sufficiency of this fee increase and indicated that Fire Assistant Chief Aaron White could answer any questions about the bill.

Mr. Leroy Maddox, Legislative Attorney, explained that the \$10,000 fee does not conflict with the \$5,000 limit referenced in the Express Powers Act because that limit applies only to laws adopted under that act. He clarified that fire protection fines fall under Section 9-701 of the

Maryland Public Safety Article, which gives counties the authority to set penalties without a specified cap. Therefore, the fee can exceed \$5,000 since the Express Powers Act is not applicable in this case.

Dinora Hernandez, Office of Law, clarified that the initial confusion over a \$5,000 limit arose from a misunderstanding related to the Express Powers Act. She explained that while the original text referenced \$5,000, Mr. Maddox clarified that under the Public Safety Article 9-701, which governs fire code matters, there is no capped fee, allowing for penalties beyond \$5,000.

Council Member Blegay asked why a \$10,000 fine is necessary, given that lower fines apply for other offenses. In response, Assistant Chief White explained that a Workgroup identified an increase in unauthorized, large gatherings, often held in small homes with 100 to 200 people, and that current enforcement measures are inadequate. Assistant Chief White further stated that the high fine is intended to serve as a strong financial deterrent to prevent these gatherings by lowering the permissible attendee threshold from 100 to 50, thereby making enforcement easier and helping to mitigate the issue before it escalates.

Council Member Blegay questioned whether the language might mistakenly penalize private individuals hosting a one-time event, such as a personal party, instead of targeting businesses or those repeatedly hosting large, disruptive gatherings.

In response, Assistant Chief White clarified that the intent is not to target private events, as homeowners typically control their guest lists and adhere to local norms. He explained that the focus is on addressing illegal parties that attract large, unruly crowds outside the neighborhood, often associated with business activities.

Council Member Blegay requested input on refining the language so that the penalties apply only to those continuously hosting parties that negatively impact their communities.

Council Member Fisher raised questions about the fine structure. She sought clarification on the difference between a \$250 fine for an initial offense under Subsection (a) and a \$10,000 fine under Subsection (c) for repeated violations. Ms. Skinner clarified that Section 28-262 - Fire Code Violations – covers reckless endangerment, while other offenses or violations listed under Section 11-103 carry an initial fine of \$250, with subsection C applying to repeated civil violations.

Council Member Fisher asked how party attendance is determined for imposing a \$10,000 fine, especially in immigrant communities. She questioned the method of counting individuals and wondered whether there was a standardized process or form to document and prove the number of attendees. She emphasized the need for clear, fair criteria to ensure that fines are justified, particularly for gatherings that might not pose a significant risk.

Assistant Chief White explained that, as part of their operations, individuals can enter the premises and obtain photographic evidence to document the number of individuals present at these large gatherings.

Council Member Fisher noted that addressing the issue of promoters is challenging because they frequently move across jurisdictions within the DMV region. She explained that no clear

promoter law in Montgomery County, D.C., or Prince George's County makes enforcement difficult. Council Member Fisher emphasized that regional discussions are ongoing, and although no solution has been finalized, the bill is a valuable step forward.

Council Member Blegay sought clarification on the \$10,000 fine under Section 11-29201, which only applies to reckless endangerment involving deadly situations.

In response, Assistant Chief White expressed that their intent is not to penalize individuals unfairly. He further explained that most changes in the bill are designed to enhance safety, such as addressing repeated false fire alarms in apartment complexes, which divert emergency services from real emergencies. He also noted that standard inspection fees have not increased in 20 years.

After discussion, the Health, Human Services, and Public Safety Committee voted favorably 4-0 on CB-020-2025.