

PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY COUNCIL
COMMITTEE REPORT
2024 Legislative Session

Reference No.: CB-009-2024

Draft No.: 1

Committee: Health, Human Services, and Public Safety

Date: April 4, 2024

Action: FAV (A)

REPORT:

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

Absent: Council Member Blegay

The Health, Human Services, and Public Safety Committee convened on April 4, 2024, to consider CB-009-2024. The legislation would establish a voluntary 9-1-1 Emergency Registry administered by the Police Department for individuals and caregivers of those with special needs.

CB-009-2024 was considered in the Health, Human Services, and Public Safety Committee on March 21, 2024, and was held in committee for two weeks to allow further collaboration with the County Council and the Administration. CB-009-2024 was reconsidered in the Health, Human Services, and Public Safety Committee on April 4, 2024, as a proposed Draft 2.

The bill sponsor, Council Member Oriadha, thanked her colleagues, the administration, and the Chief Legislative Attorney for their work on the draft. It aligns with the spirit of the legislation, ensuring the safety of our most vulnerable populations dealing with mental health issues or special needs when using 9-1-1. Council Member Oriadha further stated that given the occurrences nationwide, this draft brings us closer to a system that instills confidence in our community.

Amanda Denison, Chief Legislative Attorney, explained the difference between Draft 1, County Executive proposed amendments, and Draft 2. Ms. Denison explained that her goal was to integrate Draft 1 with the administration's proposed amendments into a comprehensive Draft 2. She further explained that the most significant change is the placement in the code, shifting from Subtitle 18. Police to Subtitle 6. Emergency Management and creating a division for the Office of Public Safety Communication (PSC) following discussion at the last committee meeting.

Ms. Denison gave context and justification for relocating the code's placement to the Office of Public Safety Communication. Although this office isn't explicitly listed in the code, it falls under the Office of Homeland Security, specifically within the Office of Public Safety Communication. This office manages 9-1-1 calls and dispatching. Draft 2 places it in Subtitle 6., establishing a new division for the Office of Public Safety Communication and incorporating language from Draft 1 and the County Executive amendments. This shift clarifies the substantial format change seen in Draft 2

Continuing with the amendments, Ms. Denison stated that clarification was provided on "first responders," and at the end of this bill, there is an exception. This exception pertains to the municipalities, Maryland State Police, and Maryland Park Police. They are an exception since our Office of PSC does not service them and they are not entities that would receive information from our 9-1-1 calls nor are they a part of the register.

Additionally, there are language adjustments regarding when a registrant can opt into the program, the duration of their active information, and the renewal process. Lastly, there's an addition from the County Executive concerning HIPAA qualifications, ensuring the confidentiality and productivity of this medical information.

Sakinda Skinner, County Council Liaison, the Office of the County Executive, stated their support of code placement to the Office of PSC. She emphasized maintaining the current wording on Page 3, (c) (1). A registrant may opt into the program at any time. Also, on Page 3, (c) (2) is to remain the same; it is the responsibility of the registrant to ensure the information provided in the registry is up-to-date and accurate. Lastly, on Page 3, (c) (3), registration information expires

at the end of every year. Registrants shall re-register annually. Ms. Skinner highlighted the strain on resources caused by outdated information in public safety databases, emphasizing the need for accurate data for first responders. Lastly, requesting that the Office of Public Safety Communications shall have until July 1, 2024, to implement the provisions of this Act.

DCAO Barry Stanton for Public Safety expressed support for the legislation. Mr. Stanton indicated that while there are concerns raised by Ms. Skinner that need to be addressed, overall, he believes this is excellent legislation for the public, the community, and 9-1-1 communications.

The Office of Law finds CB-009-2024 to be in legal legislative form with no legal impediments.

Council Member Hawkins made a friendly amendment suggesting 90 days from the annual date that a reminder goes out that asks registrants to update their information or confirm that it's accurate. If they confirm it's accurate, they automatically remain in the system. If they do not reply by the annual date, then they're purged out of the system. There will be no gap in service but still allow registrants to be removed from the system annually if needed.

Ms. Skinner indicates that the key is regularly removing old information to maintain database efficiency. The Office of PSC will conduct ongoing programming and outreach to the community, ensuring registrants can opt in at any time. Ms. Skinner further stated that she respectfully disagrees with the 90-day notice but agrees with the rest of the proposed language. The compromise could be a 90-day notice every 30 days to maximize registrant information updates.

Council Member Olson expressed support for the compromised language.

Council Member Watson asked about the options to register. Ms. Skinner indicated that citizens could walk in and fill out a form at different police districts, email, or on the public safety website, or libraries. Mr. Stanton indicated that the information once developed will be provided to the Council Members.

A motion was made by Council Member Hawkins and seconded by Council Member Olson that registrants will be notified 90 days annually on October 1, November 1, and December 1, once every 30 days for a total of 90 days, before

their registration expires on December 31st each year, thereby giving them time to confirm or update their information. If they do not respond or update by December 31st of each year, they will be removed from the list. The motion passed 4-0.

A second motion was made by Council Member Hawkins and seconded by Council Member Olson to include an additional clause in the bill, stating that compliance must be achieved by July 1, 2024. The motion passed 4-0.

A motion was made by Council Member Hawkins and seconded by Council Olson to move favorably on Draft 2. The motion passed 4-0.

A motion was made by Council Member Watson and seconded by Vice Chair Hawkins to move favorably on Draft 2 as amended. The motion passed 4-0.

CB-009-2024 was further discussed in a subsequent Health, Human Services, and Public Safety Committee meeting on March 21, 2024.

The Bill creates a voluntary 9-1-1 Emergency Registry administered by the Police Department. It allows individuals and caregivers of those with special needs or heightened sensitivities to proactively inform the Prince George's County Police Department, alerting first responders about the specific needs of these individuals. This aims to prevent potential discomfort and misunderstanding for both the first responder and the individual in an emergency.

The Bill lists certain possible behaviors for registered individuals on page 2. Individuals may opt out of the program after registering, and there is no limit on the number of times an individual can register.

The Legislative Budget and Policy Analyst provided an overview of the legislation and the fiscal impact. Mr. Williams indicated that CB-009-2024 will likely have a limited adverse impact. Implementing this program will require additional administrative expenditures to establish, operate, and maintain this registry. As of the date of this memorandum, Council staff has not received information from the Administration necessary to estimate what that impact would be; however, the Montgomery County Council is considering virtually identical legislation, and the Fiscal Impact Statement supplied by their Office of Management and Budget anticipates the need for one additional full-time position; they estimate first-year costs of roughly \$330,000, with a continuing annual fee of just under \$200,000.

Further, the enactment of CB-009-2024 may improve emergency service delivery and reduce the number of use-of-force incidents by briefing first responders on the condition of persons involved in calls for service before they arrive on the scene.

The bill sponsor, Council Member Oriadha, expressed the complexities involved in emergencies involving individuals with disabilities and the critical need for proactive measures to prevent unnecessary harm or loss of life. Council Member Oriadha expressed concern for law enforcement officers who may be put in difficult situations. By addressing these issues proactively, we can prevent trauma and ensure better outcomes for everyone involved.

Public testimony was heard from the following individuals: Qiana Johnson, Executive Director of Life After Release, and co-conductor and co-founder of Harry and Flawless Dreams. Ms. Johnson spoke in support of establishing a voluntary registry for emergency 911 calls involving impaired or disabled citizens, sharing her personal experiences with a family member living with autism. Ms. Johnson's perspective highlights the urgent need for support and assistance during emergencies, particularly for individuals with disabilities who may face unique challenges.

Ms. Denise Sizer spoke in support of CB-009-2024, highlighting the urgent need for awareness and education regarding individuals with disabilities, especially in emergencies involving law enforcement. Ms. Sizer emphasized the importance of officers being trained to understand and respond appropriately to individuals with autism and other disabilities, which is crucial for ensuring their safety and well-being. Ms. Sizer suggested having a safe word for youth with autism or disabilities in 911 calls and ensuring officers are informed about the presence of disabilities before responding to a call, which is an important step toward preventing misunderstandings and potential harm.

Sakinda Skinner, County Council Liaison, the Office of the County Executive, indicates that the County Executive supports the spirit of this bill. However, concerns have been raised regarding the potential redundancy and fiscal impact of creating a new infrastructure separate from the existing Public Safety Communication (PSC) system, which already has features to support such initiatives. Ms. Skinner mentioned a need for more education and awareness

campaigns about the current system and its capabilities. Major Cline is expected to elaborate further on this during the discussion.

Major Cline expressed support for preventing tragedies involving individuals with disabilities and emphasized the existing capabilities within the PSC system. He mentioned the current process of entering information about disabilities into the Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) system, which allows responding officers and EMS personnel to be notified about specific needs on scene. Major Cline highlighted that this process is already in place and involves filling out a form that is reviewed annually to ensure accuracy and relevance. He mentioned that minor tweaks may be needed to enhance the process and prevent fraudulent claims, but overall, he expressed the police department's full support for the proposed legislation.

Council Member Olson requested further clarification regarding whether there is currently a register. Major Cline indicated there isn't a register but a form they fill out. It would have to be requested by the citizen. Council Member Olson indicated he was unaware of the current CAD system. While there are existing capabilities, the legislation aims to mandate the creation of a more accessible and voluntary registry.

Major Cline clarified that there is a current system called a premise hazard check, where officers fill out a form listing disabilities, which is then entered into the CAD system. When a call arrives for that address, the information appears on the dispatcher's screen and the officer's in-car computer screen. However, there is a need for a more robust system where citizens can voluntarily input their information without face-to-face interaction with an officer. This would require a public entry portal.

Council Members discussed the need for clarity and coordination between the current system and the proposed registry to ensure effectiveness in helping individuals with disabilities.

Council Member Watson needed additional clarity regarding the fiscal implications of passing the Volunteer Registry Portal bill and how amendments may impact costs, which is crucial. It's essential to have clarity on the financial aspect before

proceeding further. Exploring whether amendments could potentially reduce costs or keep them about the same would provide valuable insights for decision-making.

Ms. Skinner indicated that the numbers that she referenced were anywhere between \$660,000 to \$990,000. Based on the analysis conducted by the policy analyst for the council, which includes references to Montgomery County's figures, the cost may not be as high as initially estimated. This will depend on the friendly amendments proposed and how the bill can be adjusted to utilize existing infrastructure and align with the current practices of the Police Department. Ms. Skinner recommended further discussion of the bill after consulting with the PSC team to enhance and integrate the system for better effectiveness and incorporate input from 911 in the discussions.

Council Member Oriadha suggested that the committee approve the bill to establish the Voluntary Registry Portal and emphasized the importance of specifying the PSC language in the bill.

A motion was proposed by Council Member Blegay and seconded by Council Member Olson to move favorably. Council Member Blegay expressed that there was no necessity to delay, emphasizing the urgency for the legislation to be voted out of committee. The motion to move favorably failed 2-0-3.

Council Member Hawkins indicated that he supports the intent of the bill. However, a 3-month hold was suggested for further deliberation between the impacted parties, including 911. A subsequent motion was made by Council Member Hawkins and seconded by Chair Fisher to hold CB-009-2024 for three months to allow the sponsors and administration to agree on the amendments and have 911 at the next meeting. Chair Fisher emphasized the need for collaboration with all relevant agencies to ensure proper execution and appropriate allocation of funds for this initiative.

Council Member Olson stated that if the legislation is passed, it won't pass immediately, and we need to consider potential budget adjustments during the budget process; waiting until the next budget cycle isn't feasible. Council Member Olson stated that the existing system provides a foundation and believes we can build upon it.

Ms. Skinner restated that the administration does not oppose this legislation's intent. They recognize that the bill's intent is a registry, but we need to ensure that there is a way to marry the two systems so it can effectively work. Therefore, the administration respectfully asks for two weeks for further deliberations.

Council Member Hawkins amended his motion to hold for two weeks, after which legislation will come before the committee and can be moved favorably. Chair Fish seconded the motion. The motion passed 5-0.