

CITY OF BALTIMORE

BRANDON M. SCOTT, Mayor



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

100 Holliday Street, Rm 250
Baltimore, Maryland 21202

December 15, 2020

Ms. Isabel Mercedes Cumming
Inspector General, Baltimore City
100 North Holliday Street, Suite 635
Baltimore, MD 21202

Ms. Kelly B. Madigan
Inspector General, Baltimore County
400 Washington Avenue
Towson, MD 21204

Dear Inspectors General Cumming and Madigan:

I am responding to a report on Baltimore City Office of Inspector General (OIG) case number 20-0040-I and Baltimore County OIG case number 20-018 on behalf of Mayor Brandon Scott. The investigations were performed jointly by your respective offices. I thank you both for your thorough review and analysis on the issues of water billing in Baltimore City and Baltimore County.

I concur with your conclusion that communication between the City and the County can be improved, and that there is “an absence of uniformity in the systems used by the two jurisdictions, and a general lack of accountability” as it relates to the issue of water billing. As you note, the relationship between the City and County regarding metered water service is arcane, confusing, and outdated. The relationship stems from State law, which was implemented via agreements between Baltimore City and County. The law and agreements were revised periodically. In addition, there are legal opinions issued by arbitrators that have added to the complexity and confusion on this issue.

Unfortunately, this confusing and arcane relationship has resulted in a lack of understanding and communications. Your report notes “8,000 tickets” that were sent to the City from the County in the form of emails. I would note that this issue is not so much the number of tickets but the report’s note that they were not “addressed by the City to the satisfaction of the County.” City employees have noted that thousands of tickets have been addressed, but there are still disagreements on the completion of many of the remaining tickets. Disagreement on such a broad scale makes it difficult to ensure consistent management and responsiveness to critical issues.

Largely because of this confusion and complexity, we have relied increasingly on contract and consultant support. This has led to more control of critical operations by contractors and consultants rather than City employees. Additionally, the City and County have begun holding periodic meetings between senior-level staff where coordination and discussion of water-related issues, including metered water billing, occur.

A preliminary audit was conducted this past year by the City into water billing related to accounts that were not included in the billing system. The audit recommended a more detailed review of water billing to address some of the areas you have noted. Additionally, a report on the water and wastewater utilities performed by a vendor jointly contracted by the City and County examining issues of communication, staffing, and governance is forthcoming. I am committed to working with your offices and others in Baltimore County to collaboratively address these issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "DR", with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Daniel Ramos
Deputy Chief Administrative Officer
Baltimore City