



# STATE *of the* CITY

SEVENTEENTH ANNUAL

FEBRUARY 29, 2016  
MAYOR STEPHANIE RAWLINGS-BLAKE

@MayorSRB #SOTC

Mr. President, members of the City Council, Madam Comptroller, friends and colleagues in government, faithful clergy, labor leaders, committed citizens of Baltimore City: Today marks the 7<sup>th</sup> time I appear before you to report on the state of our city. Together we have faced many challenges, shared many successes, and worked hard to grow Baltimore.

As I look back over the past six years as the Mayor of this great city, I take great pride in all that we have accomplished. Through new ideas and innovative initiatives, we have relentlessly sought to create a government that is more efficient, more transparent, and more responsive.

## A CHALLENGING YEAR

---

Since I was last before you, Baltimore has had a challenging year, experiencing heart-wrenching moments that attracted the nation's attention.

I can't say enough about the professionalism and courage demonstrated by our firefighters and police officers. I also want to express my gratitude to all of the first responders from neighboring jurisdictions who provided critical assistance in our city's time of need.

No words can truly capture the range of emotions we experienced together as our city endured the traumatic events of last spring. And the surge in violence that followed further tested our resolve.

I have told this story before, but during the unrest, I visited a group of fourth graders in West Baltimore to talk about what was happening in their neighborhood.

I was asked a question by a girl no older than 9. Her question was as perceptive as it was heartbreaking.

She asked: "Why do people want to hurt our neighborhood?" It occurred to me, here is a 9-year-old girl who was surely frightened by what she saw on TV, or by what she most likely heard from her own bedroom window.

But this girl, who is even younger than my own daughter, was not concerned about her safety. She did not ask, "Why is this happening to ME?" Instead, she asked about "OUR neighborhood," about "OUR City."

There was also sadness. I remember the tears of seniors who saw flames engulf the neighborhood pharmacy they relied upon for medicine, the hurt on the faces from small shop owners who could not comprehend why their own

customers had looted their stores, and the mothers who were angry that their children were disrespecting their own communities.

But I also witnessed the individual gestures of goodwill. An extraordinary outpouring of volunteers helping with food and medical deliveries all over the city. Our residents, along with neighbors from surrounding counties, showing up with brooms and supplies to help clean. Dr. Carla Hayden and her Enoch Pratt team keeping our libraries open during the most challenging hours to ensure our children had a safe place.

Baltimore's story continues to be one of resilience.

## **MAKING BALTIMORE SAFER**

---

While we refuse to be defined by these events, we cannot ignore the culture of violence that pervades our streets. It must end.

I have stood before you many times, frustrated and angry, that far too many of the homicides in our city share a common detail – young African-American men killing young African-American men.

It is a problem that policing alone will not cure. It will take the involvement of our entire community.

I want to highlight a few individuals in our city who are making a real difference.

People like Larry Young, Munir Bahar, Rev. Harold Carter, Jr., Rev. Gregory Perkins, Tessa Hill-Aston, and so many other community leaders, business leaders, and faith leaders.

They believe, like I do, that by working together we will break these patterns of violence.

Last year, I appointed Kevin Davis to be our Police Commissioner. He has taken command of the Police Department and instilled a confidence and command style that demonstrates a commitment to reform.

He has brought new ideas and a spirit of collaboration with our local, state and federal partners. The multi-jurisdictional War Room, as well as the embedding of federal investigators through B-Fed, have been critical to the crime fight.

Last week Commissioner Davis and I announced a joint effort with Johns Hopkins University to apply data and research to policing in an effort to make our communities safer.

While we believe in the power of data, we are also not afraid to use bold initiatives to confront the culture of violence that pervades our streets – Operation Ceasefire is now in both East and West Baltimore, and we are expanding our Safe Streets program to Sandtown-Winchester next month.

## IMPLEMENTING POLICE REFORM

---

The majority of the men and women of the Baltimore Police Department serve with great honor and distinction. They are doing a job that few are capable of doing, and far fewer are willing. I speak on behalf of a grateful city and sincerely say, “Thank you.”

We know this is not an easy time to be a police officer.

Unfortunately, the actions of a few officers have created distrust and tension between law enforcement and the communities that they have sworn to protect.

The erosion of trust we have witnessed between citizens and the police in Baltimore was decades in the making. Now more than ever, we must address this divide and make the needed reforms so we can improve and build a better relationship.

In May, I took the unprecedented step of asking the Department of Justice to open a civil rights pattern and practice investigation into the Baltimore Police Department. This investigation will help our efforts to have a fair, just, and responsive police department. But let me be clear: we are not waiting for the Department of Justice before we make reforms. We know reforms are not going to be easy. We know it is not going to be cheap. But I can promise you this: It will get done.

On Friday night, I joined Commissioner Davis at the police department’s graduation. I was pleased to hear him inform the new officers that they will spend their first 90 days on full-time foot patrol. What better way for these graduates to understand our neighborhoods and our residents.

To further rebuild community trust, this spring we will begin city-wide implementation of body-worn cameras for our police officers. Given our size, we know that police departments throughout the country are watching us. That is why it was so important to conduct a two-month pilot program. We needed to

make sure that we had the best technology and procedures in place. We have to get this right.

I heard loud and clear from communities during my public safety forums that residents felt their relationship with the police was damaged, if not broken. We need to strike a balance between the due process rights of law enforcement officers accused of wrongdoing, and giving our police commissioner more authority over discipline. Again last week, I testified before the General Assembly for reforms to the Law Enforcement Officers' Bill of Rights. These changes are critical to repair the tension in our communities.

And at the end of this session, I hope we can all gather in Annapolis when the Governor signs this legislation into law.

## A CLEANER CITY

---

As we fight for safer communities, we recognize that crime and grime go hand in hand. Across the city this past year, I joined many of you for Crime and Grime Walks. I brought members of my Cabinet and representatives from key agencies to walk block by block to address chronic problems. I want to thank everyone who braved the cold, and rain, and heat.

We are always looking for new ways to engage our communities.

That's why in October, I launched our Clean Corps initiative. We are training and empowering community leaders and giving them the tools they need to help us keep their streets clean. From small initiatives to larger efforts, residents are taking charge.

In November, we began a new program to help keep many of our major roads clean. You may have seen the Sponsor-A-Road signs throughout the city. At zero cost to taxpayers, businesses are paying for regular trash removal. I want to thank the companies that have joined our effort.

And tomorrow, we launch the citywide rollout of our Municipal Trash Can program. We know these cans mean cleaner alleys, fewer rats, and greater satisfaction with overall cleanliness, and I am excited to bring this to every home in the city.

## ELIMINATING BLIGHT

---

I was blessed to grow up in a strong community. And I have been fortunate to realize the dream of home ownership. I wanted to help others have that same opportunity.

That is why when I became Mayor, I launched “Vacants to Value,” the city’s first comprehensive blight elimination plan.

We targeted code enforcement efforts to put pressure on absentee landowners and speculators, and eliminated bureaucratic red tape.

We demolished abandoned buildings and created new housing opportunities and incentives to attract new residents to Baltimore.

And every year, I work to make Vacants to Value better. Just last year, we contracted with Humanim to create the first city-sponsored deconstruction program. We are salvaging resources and creating new jobs.

Through Vacants to Value, I quadrupled our demolition funding to \$100 million over 10 years.

It makes me proud that Vacants to Value was recognized by the Clinton Global Initiative, and honored by the *Financial Times* as an original idea that made life better for people living and working in cities. Even the Abell Foundation recently noted that Vacants to Value is the most ambitious blight elimination effort that Baltimore has seen in 40 years.

Governor Hogan recognized our progress by committing \$75 million over four years to support our initiative.

Throughout the city, the transformation is real. We demolished vacant properties along Park Heights Avenue to launch the renaissance of a neighborhood with a rich and deep history. In Barclay and Greenmount West, working families have become homeowners, artists have affordable units to live and work, and low-income seniors have a place to call home. In O’Donnell Heights, we are transforming a former public housing site into over 60 acres of vibrant new mixed-income homes. We are making Baltimore better, one neighborhood at a time.

Nearly 2,500 homebuyer assistance grants have been awarded through my Baltimore Homeownership Incentive Program. I also want to thank the private sector for stepping up to the plate and participating in our Live Near Your Work Program.

This year I am proposing to do even more with the creation of a property tax credit for our sworn police officers, firefighters and sheriff's deputies who own homes in our city as their primary residence. I want to encourage more of our first responders to live in the neighborhoods they are sworn to protect.

Up and down the East Coast, high prices are pushing people out of the cities they love. This is a fact not lost on me, which is why building and preserving affordable housing is critical. On top of the hundreds of affordable units that we helped create annually, on this year's general election ballot, \$6 million in new affordable housing funds will be included for the first time ever.

## **LEVERAGING OUR STRENGTHS**

---

We are building from our strengths. And in Baltimore, one of those strengths is our anchor institutions – also known as our “eds and meds.”

It seems like such a simple idea – to recognize that our futures are interconnected – but it took the effort of every city agency, numerous community partners, and our anchor institutions to create these new sectors of investment.

It started on the West Side through a partnership with Dr. Jay Perman that produced such dramatic change that we expanded citywide. Our UniverCity partnership evolved into my Baltimore City Anchor Plan involving hospitals and universities across the city. These institutions are actively working in partnership with the city to make a difference by building more affordable housing, employing city residents, supporting local businesses, and improving neighborhood amenities. This award-winning program is now a model for cities across our country.

Collaboration is also key to my LINC program. Our commercial corridors throughout our city should reflect the beauty and the strength of the neighborhoods they serve. Unfortunately, many do not. My Leveraging Investments in Neighborhood Corridors initiative will enhance both the aesthetics and the economic vitality of key gateways. We are putting the community in the driver's seat, and I have seen the excitement.

## **ENHANCING ACCESS TO FOOD**

---

From my earliest years on the City Council, before anyone was talking about food deserts, I was determined to bring a grocery store back to Howard Park.

My colleagues and I grappled to find solutions. It took years. But we got it done.

Informed by that experience, I became the first mayor in the country to hire a Food Policy Director and established our city's first Food Policy Initiative

We performed an in-depth analysis to determine the greatest food access needs across the city. We launched a virtual supermarket program to fill some of those gaps. We created an agricultural tax credit to promote urban farms. It is innovative programs like these that give our citizens, especially our seniors, access to fresh, affordable foods.

To attract supermarkets to our underserved areas, I created a new tax credit. This is a critical tool to attract high quality food retailers, and I want to thank both the General Assembly and all of you on the Council for supporting my initiative.

## CREATING JOBS

---

To grow our city, we have to grow jobs.

Since I became Mayor, I have delivered for our city residents. Our unemployment rate is down by more than a third, and we have created more than 20,000 new jobs.

We focused on the small entrepreneurs in our neighborhoods who are at the heart of job creation, as well as the larger development projects and established businesses that support hundreds, if not thousands, of jobs.

Last year, I released my Strategic Plan for Small Business and Entrepreneurship Growth in Baltimore. Since then, we launched Baltimore City SourceLink – a regional referral network which connects entrepreneurs to local, regional, and state resources. I also appointed a new Small Business Advisory Committee to improve advocacy and ensure a voice for Baltimore's diverse small business community.

City government is doing our part to increase spending with local businesses. We created bid preferences for HUBZone projects, added an Economic Benefits Evaluation factor to Requests for Proposals, and issued an Executive Order encouraging Cabinet Agencies to increase their spending with small, local businesses.



Many of our investments in entrepreneurship focus on tech and innovation. Even in tough times, I recognized it was important to invest in the innovation economy.

Today, Baltimore is widely recognized as one of the top tech hubs in the country. *Inc.* magazine recently recognized Baltimore as a “surprising hub” for tech startups. And *Forbes* ranked us as 6th on its list of best cities for tech jobs.

From the success of our Emerging Technology Center, we now have clusters of start-ups throughout the city – downtown, Station North, Remington and South Baltimore. And we recently announced plans for an Innovation Village in West Baltimore.

As exciting as it is to see so many tech jobs created, I know we must also create opportunities for those who are the toughest to employ in our city. From my years as a public defender, I saw the barriers that confront ex-offenders when they try to re-enter society and support their families.

Last year, we created the Bridge To Careers workforce training model that prepares low-skilled, ex-offenders for careers. It is working, and this year I will increase its budget by 50 percent.

## A HEALTHIER CITY

---

I have personally seen the devastation that heroin addiction brings to a family. I know we cannot reasonably expect to find lasting success in our city without addressing our opioid addiction and overdose crisis.

These are big problems, and for years, too many people were not doing enough. Because drug and alcohol addiction impacts nearly every issue facing our communities, I knew we needed to be aggressive to achieve results.

With recommendations provided by the Heroin Treatment and Prevention Task Force that I convened, our Health Commissioner, Dr. Leana Wen, has implemented one of the most ambitious opioid overdose strategies in the country.

When I became Mayor our city faced infant mortality and teen pregnancy rates that were unacceptable. Through the exceptional work of B'More for Healthy Babies, we have seen a 24% reduction in infant mortality and a 32% reduction in teen birth rates.

The White House recognized our leadership in HIV care, and last year we joined the Fast Track Cities initiative to end AIDS by 2030.

We also have not run away from the need to care for our homeless. Since I came into office we have doubled the budget for shelters. Last year, we joined the national challenge to end homelessness among our veterans, and we continue to work toward permanent supportive housing.

## AN 'AWESOME' CITY

---

Baltimore is getting national attention for how many millennials are moving here. There are a number of reasons – jobs, of course, being one. But the reason they will stay is because Baltimore is pretty awesome.

From musicians to artists to foodies, we have made Baltimore a hip place to be. People want a real city, not a generic landscape. They want to be part of a sustainable city. A walkable city. A city that shaped our nation's history. A welcoming city. A vibrant city in which each neighborhood has its own unique identity. A city of robust arts and culture, known nationally for its free festivals. Next month's Light City will build upon that reputation.

Baltimore is becoming more green and sustainable. We are committed to providing a broad range of transportation options – from the free and green Charm City Circulator, which we expanded last year to reach more parts of our city, to the adoption of a Bicycle Master Plan that will include our first Bike Share program later this fall. We are making Baltimore accessible for more of our citizens.

It doesn't hurt that in 2015 *Zagat* ranked our city second overall for top dining towns nationwide.

We also know that a robust broadband infrastructure is absolutely vital to our City's future. In many ways, creating such a network is the great infrastructure challenge of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Last year I named our city's first broadband coordinator. And based on our Smarter City Task Force report, we are laying the foundation to create a fiber network across the city – connecting neighborhoods, public schools and public housing to city fiber, making it easier for homes and businesses to access broadband services.

And we are not done.

## MODERNIZING GOVERNMENT

---

We are consistently looking for new ways to get better results and operate more efficiently.

By modernizing city government and restructuring bureaucracy, we have assured Baltimore's future is on more solid footing.

Last year, I formed my IDEA team – **I**nnovation, **D**elivery, **E**vidence and **A**ccountability. We are encouraging employees to think of new ways to relentlessly cut through bureaucracy and better deliver services. Chief Ford and our Fire Department are leaders in this effort, reworking their inspection process to cut the time it takes to receive occupancy permits.

We are making smarter choices in allocating City resources with our efforts to align CitiStat's performance management work to Outcome Budgeting through OutcomeStat.

## RESTORING PUBLIC TRUST

---

Together, we worked to restore our citizen's confidence and faith in government and those elected to represent them.

We implemented the most significant improvements to our City's ethics code in many years, we restructured the ethics board to make it more independent, and we made significant investments in our Inspector General's office to root out fraud and corruption.

## MAKING TOUGH CHOICES

---

I made a promise to myself when I became Mayor that I would leave this city in better condition than it was left for me.

I was immediately faced with a projected budget shortfall of \$120 million. To make matters worse, it was clear that without major reforms, the cost of the Fire and Police pension system would explode, adding \$65 million more to the gap.

My administration faced this deficit challenge, and many others that followed. To fix our long-term structural deficit while protecting our shared priorities, I created the City's first 10-year financial plan.

And since the plan was announced, the City has reduced costs, pumped tens of millions of dollars into capital projects such as roads, recreation centers and libraries, and shrunk our unfunded liabilities.

The tough choices I made enabled us to launch the city's first sustainable plan to reduce homeowners' property taxes 20 cents by 2020. In this coming year's budget the next installment of that property tax cut will be included.

I took on pension reform, healthcare reform, and leave reform – all of those tough issues that so many elected officials prefer to kick down the road to the next generation.

But that's not who I am. I am not persuaded by what is politically popular, but what is best for the citizens of Baltimore.

As a result, we have achieved the City's highest combined bond rating in half a century – a rating that means we can spend fewer taxpayer dollars on interest payments to banks and more on services for our citizens.

However, next year we still face a projected \$65 million gap between revenues and expenditures. We know this will require all of us to make some tough choices. But without that 10-year financial plan and the hard decisions we have already made, that gap would be three times worse – nearly \$200 million. Just imagine the cuts we would need to make to city services.

With these tough choices and reforms, old ways of doing business came to an end, and we cannot go back. The City continues to face significant fiscal risks. We must be diligent when making decisions with a fiscal impact. I have said many times before, we will never stop dreaming big dreams for Baltimore, but as elected leaders we have an obligation to balance hope and optimism with reality and responsible stewardship.

## **INVESTING IN OUR YOUTH**

---

I was fortunate to have a family that believed in education. I love to learn. And I learn new things every day.

This is why I worked so hard to find the money to rebuild our schools. The bottle tax that we passed together secured the most significant school construction plan in our city's history. With the help of the General Assembly

and advocates, \$1.1 billion is now earmarked for our children's education future.

Next month we will hold a ground-breaking at the first new elementary school that is the result of our 21<sup>st</sup> Century School Building Plan. We have made real progress.

Last summer, my YouthWorks program created over 8,000 job placements for our city's young people. We could not have done this without the help of Baltimore businesses, foundations and numerous government agencies at all levels.

Applications are already pouring in for this summer's program. We will once again work with our partners to employ thousands of Baltimore youth in the coming months.

I want to extend thanks to Jason Perkins-Cohen, director of my Office of Employment Development, and Michael Cryor, chairman of One Baltimore, as well as Donald Fry, president and CEO of the Greater Baltimore Committee, for your leadership on this and my Hire One initiative.

I remember my first job with great fondness. It taught me responsibility and the importance of savings. And I want to make sure that today's youth have that same experience.

Hundreds of youth participated in our inaugural snow shoveling program. I am not sure if they knew their first days on the job would be during the single largest snowstorm in our City's history, but they showed up and worked hard to clear the sidewalks for our seniors and residents with disabilities. Their work and their enthusiasm to help our seniors made me so proud.

Before I came into office, the City was closing recreation centers without a real plan on how to fill in the gaps.

I was truly moved to be able to open the Morrell Park Recreation Center. It was the city's first new recreation center in over a decade. And in the coming months, we will open a fully renovated and expanded community center at CC Jackson in Parks Heights, and a newly built gymnasium in phase two of our work at the Rita Church Community Center in Clifton Park. We are not stopping there. This year we are moving ahead with the Cahill and Cherry Hill Community Centers which will each feature indoor aquatic facilities.

I encourage all of you to join me at the new facilities to see what is possible. They are modern, fun, and open to everyone in the city.

## GROWING OUR CITY

---

For the past six years, many of you have joined me as we have accomplished great things in partnership. There is a palpable electricity in Baltimore. Cranes line our skies. Neighborhoods are seeing new life. That dynamic did not happen on its own.

We created our story.

We approved economic incentives to deliver major new employers to our city – look at Exelon’s new headquarters at Harbor Point rising from a brownfield; visit the new casino and engage in conversation with all of the city residents employed there; and go see Amazon’s fulfillment center in an enterprise zone that created even more jobs than was originally forecast.

The apartment tax credit that we created has sparked the construction of thousands of market-rate units across the city.

Our economy is growing. We have built a stronger foundation for Baltimore’s future.

## THANK YOU

---

As I think back over the events of the past year, I am most proud of the resilience we have shown the world – our commitment to come back, stronger than ever, as one community, one city. Because in our hearts, we know that we are all One Baltimore.

As the leader of almost 12,000 employees, I want to take a moment to thank everyone who sacrificed so much during the challenging times of last April and the months that followed – our police officers, our firefighters, our EMS and all other first responders who performed heroically; our public works and transportation employees who cleared away the debris and cleaned up our streets; the economic support teams who immediately reached out to damaged businesses to facilitate recovery; the health care workers who made sure seniors had their prescriptions and families received support during traumatic times; and so many more.

It is my honor and privilege to lead this city as your Mayor.

Because of all of our hard work, the remarkable citizens we serve, and the tough decisions that we made, I am grateful to be able to confidently report that the state of our city is stronger today than when I became Mayor.

We have restored the critical foundation for our city's future, from its finances to our citizens' trust in government. We have created jobs and opportunity and, perhaps most importantly, momentum. Together, we have worked to grow Baltimore.

On this, one of my final occasions to appear before you all as Mayor, I want to recognize a few special people. Their unconditional love and support have been critical to me as I juggle my responsibilities as Mayor and my most important job: being the Mother of my 12-year-old daughter. Thank you to my husband Kent, my wonderful mother, and my entire family for all you do for me every day.

I want to close by thanking the citizens of Baltimore for affording me the opportunity to serve you for 21 years.

This has been the greatest honor of my life.

Thank you. God bless you, and God bless Baltimore.



OFFICE OF MAYOR STEPHANIE RAWLINGS-BLAKE  
CITY HALL  
ROOM 250  
100 HOLLIDAY STREET  
BALTIMORE, MARYLAND 21202

[mayor.baltimorecity.gov](http://mayor.baltimorecity.gov)