

## **Cardin pays \$300 tab for wedding proposal**

### **Baltimore councilman says bill's too low for use of police boat, copter**

By Julie Bykowicz , *Baltimore Sun*, August 28, 2009

Baltimore police have calculated the cost of a lawmaker's mock police raid cum marriage proposal, which involved a department helicopter and patrol boat in the Inner Harbor. The amount: \$300. State Del. Jon S. Cardin paid the tab Thursday, but at least one city councilman thinks the figure is perplexingly low.

As promised, Cardin, a Baltimore County Democrat, wrote a check to the city after receiving a letter from Commissioner Frederick H. Bealefeld III. Cardin declined to comment further about an incident that, while widely publicized, leaves several questions unanswered.

Police spokesman Anthony Guglielmi called the tab "absolutely fair-market rate," and said it was based on 15 minutes of marine police time and boat fuel and the minutes the Foxtrot helicopter hovered over the scene. The spokesman did not provide a detailed breakdown of expenses, such as the number of officers involved and their pay rates.

That's the kind of information that Councilman William H. Cole IV is seeking. City Council President Stephanie C. Rawlings-Blake supports an inquiry.

Cole said the amount of the bill is "insulting to both city employees and to taxpayers," noting that layoffs and salary reductions for city workers might lie ahead. Baltimore is facing a \$60 million budget shortfall.

"It costs me nearly \$70.00 to fill the tank on my vehicle, and I don't drive a boat or a helicopter," Cole said in an e-mail message Thursday afternoon to Bealefeld and city leaders. "I find the \$300 tab for Delegate Cardin's poor judgment to be an insult to my intelligence."

Cole said Bealefeld called him Thursday night to talk about the numbers.

The commissioner "believes this is the true cost," Cole said. "I don't know that I'm comfortable that's enough. It just doesn't feel like what was charged adequately captures the cost of an event like that."

The councilman said he'd like to see a breakdown in writing.

The marriage proposal took place Aug. 7 on a boat belonging to a Cardin friend. Neither police nor the lawmaker identified the owner. Marine unit officers boarded the boat and pretended to search it, finding the engagement ring. At that point, Cardin proposed, and his girlfriend, Megan Homer, accepted.

After the incident gained widespread attention about 10 days later, police launched an inquiry, and Cardin told Bealefeld that he would pay for the use of resources. He has apologized to Bealefeld, Mayor Sheila Dixon and the public, and has called the proposal

stunt "one stupid act."

But he has been tight-lipped about who came up with the idea and how the police became involved. An internal investigation is under way, Guglielmi said. However, police said they will not release the name of the boat owner because no crime was committed.

"We're all just looking forward to moving on and getting back to the business of crime-fighting," Guglielmi said.

Cardin has said "several friends" were with him at the time of the proposal but has declined to identify them. Scott Lowe, the owner of a local sports marketing firm, posted messages to Twitter, a social media site, indicating that he was aboard.

"My bro in law #maryland del. jon cardin proposed 2 his fiance megan on a boat in the harbor w/ a group of friends and fam tonight #baltimore," Lowe wrote just after 8 p.m. Aug. 7, using the language and coding of the site. Lowe does not appear to be the boat's owner, according to public records.

Foxtrot is outfitted with a video camera, but the equipment was "actually down for repair" at the time of the proposal, Guglielmi wrote, responding to a public information request for the footage. He said the marine unit did not record the event.

In an interview this month, Dixon said she was concerned "more than anything" that officers had cooperated with the proposal plan and that the idea was apparently not vetted by commanding officers. A spokesman said the mayor would not comment further.

Robert F. Cherry, president of the local Fraternal Order of Police, said blame should lie with Cardin - not the officers, who he said "were the ones put in this position by an elected official."

"The best way to deal with it, from our perspective, is not to punish the officers," Cherry said. "Let's fix it so this doesn't happen again. If command has an issue with what happened, they should say to the officers, 'If someone tries to strong-arm you, let us know.'"

Cardin, 39, the nephew of U.S. Sen. Benjamin L. Cardin, has been widely criticized for misusing police resources. Political insiders have said that the stunt probably ruined his nascent bid to become Baltimore County executive next fall. He represents Owings Mills and surrounding areas, and was first elected in 2002.

In his e-mail to Bealefeld, Cole said his inquiry is "absolutely not personal." "Delegate Cardin is a nice guy, a very capable legislator and I do feel badly for him," Cole wrote. "However, that doesn't mean that we should walk away from our obligation to protect the taxpayers."

Baltimore Sun reporters Peter Hermann and Annie Linskey contributed to this article.