

Chaos detailed in 7,000 riot-related emails turned over to Baltimore Sun

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Communications within city government broke down during the riots of April 27, as officials desperate for information exchanged rumors and subordinates questioned city leaders, emails and other documents released by the city Monday reveal.

The material depicts a government in chaos on the day of **Freddie Gray's** funeral, as leaders tried to anticipate the possibility of unrest, and then to respond to what came: clashes between rock-throwing students and police officers, looting at dozens of businesses and arson throughout the city.

Even as Baltimoreans were breaching pharmacies and supermarkets, emails show, police were waiting for riot gear that was on order.

In one terse email — sent as the rioting was breaking out — William M. Johnson, the city's transportation director, called the confusion among city leaders "unacceptable."

"This issue needs to be corrected unless I am the only person who finds this unacceptable," he wrote to mayoral aides at 3:14 p.m., as television broadcast images of fighting at Mondawmin Mall. "Local news stations are reporting on what is happening, downtown buildings are closing early, and when the City looks to the Administration for leadership and answers, we don't know or we are the last to provide any guidance due to this protocol."

Johnson's email was among more than 7,000 documents that city officials turned over to The Baltimore Sun in response to a Maryland Public Information Act request. The materials show how officials handled the protests and riots that followed Gray's death in police custody.

The documents also show that Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake and Gov. Larry Hogan disagreed about when to lift the city's curfew, and that police were planning for the potential for further violence on May 1 and 2.

The city withheld an unknown number of documents, saying state law does not require disclosure of information that is part of the "deliberative process."

The city also withheld records that it said contain intelligence, security procedures or information related to emergency management. Information the city said was protected by attorney-client privilege and attorney-work product doctrine was blacked out.

"Communications that are pre-decisional and reflect the give-and-take of the decision-making process are protected," assistant city solicitors Jeffrey P. Hochstetler and Brent D. Schubert wrote in a response to The Sun's records request.

The police union and some community leaders have been critical of the response to the unrest by city leaders including Rawlings-Blake and then-Police Commissioner Anthony W. Batts.

The union has said officers lacked necessary equipment and were told to "hold the line" while their safety was endangered. Batts said the day of the rioting that officers were "outnumbered" and "outflanked."

Some have criticized Rawlings-Blake for not being visible during the early hours of the rioting, and for not asking Hogan to send in the National Guard sooner.

Johnson wrote his email in response to a message from Ganesha Martin, who was then Batts' chief of staff. Martin wrote at 2:46 p.m. that the Police Department's public information office would "begin tweeting as soon as there is any indication that there are protesters downtown. ... Right now the protesters are focused on Mondawmin. Not downtown."

Andrew Smullian, a deputy mayor, called on top city officials to provide information on liberal leave for municipal workers around lunchtime on April 27.

"We need some intel right away so we can let people know what's going on and so that we can plan appropriately," he sent in an email flagged "high importance."

Howard Libit, a spokesman for Rawlings-Blake, said Monday the emails show that the city was aware of the potential unrest on April 27 and worked to respond.

"The fact that there was confusion shouldn't come as a surprise to anyone," Libit said in a statement. "We made efforts to mobilize resources to manage that situation, as we had done over the previous week during the earlier demonstrations."

Libit said the records also show that when it became clear the city's resources weren't sufficient to "quell the unrest, a number of city officials went into overdrive to regain control of the situation."

"These real-time emails reflect that urgency and passion for the city," Libit said.

He said the city's "focus moving forward is to complete a full and thorough after-action report to ensure that the city is prepared should there be future unrest."

Another email detailed a list of police gear that was being deployed, including 259 masks sent to the Western District. Four hundred and seventy-four more mask packs were ready to be distributed, and another 1,000 had been ordered, wrote Thomas Moore, who was then chief financial officer for the Police Department.

In an update sent at 7:21 p.m., he said 17 riot bags were assembled and pepper spray canisters were ordered.

"Working on having 200 shields delivered from manufacturer for tomorrow delivery, Wednesday latest," Moore wrote.

Within hours of rioting, the city's finance director, Henry Raymond, signed off on the purchase of thousands of additional pieces of equipment.

He was asked for 1,000 pairs of "protective riot gloves," 1,000 pieces of chest, leg and arm protection items, 1,000 riot shields and 1,000 baton rings, among other items.

"Approved," Raymond wrote in an email with a 4:01 a.m. time stamp.

Johnson's strongly worded email followed a series of communications among city officials expressing concern that violence would break out on the day of Gray's funeral.

Drew Vetter, the Police Department's government affairs director, sent an email to elected officials at 10:13 p.m. Sunday warning that some students intended "to 'walk out' after first period and/or around 3pm tomorrow and head Downtown. BPD will be closely monitoring the situation and officers will be deployed accordingly."

By the next day, some officials were already talking about the possibility of a riot breaking out at Mondawmin Mall.

In an email marked "URGENT" sent at 1:52 p.m., Olivia D. Farrow, a deputy health commissioner, said the agency had "received reports that children will possibly riot after school starting at 3p down from Mondawmin to North Ave and to downtown. Staff at Druid becoming concerned. May need to close early. Waiting to see if rumor or if something seems to begin happening."

Minutes later, another health official wrote to the city's labor commissioner, saying, "There is a desire to close druid because of the children rioting on the West Side. When will you hear back from City Hall?"

The unrest April 27 followed more than a week of mostly peaceful demonstrations protesting Gray's death in police custody. The 25-year-old Baltimore man suffered a severe spinal cord injury while being transported in a police van.

The riots began at Mondawmin about 3 p.m., when students fresh from school threw rocks and water bottles at police in riot gear. The chaos spread to the intersection of Pennsylvania and North avenues, where a crowd burned and looted a CVS pharmacy, and to spots around the city, where looters breached businesses and set fires.

At 4 p.m., top officials believed police would be able to control the unrest without the help of the National Guard.

Kaliope Parthemos, the mayor's chief of staff, resisted calls for the Guard, writing "State troopers have been assisting. National guard is only when there is a state of emergency."

Rawlings-Blake called Hogan about 6:30 p.m. and asked him to deploy the Guard.

More than 60 buildings caught fire during the rioting, and more than 400 were damaged. More than 200 people were arrested.

The morning after, developer David Cordish urged one of Rawlings-Blake's deputy mayors to push for more visible leadership from the city.

"Sad and obviously difficult day w tough calls," Cordish, whose Cordish Cos. is headquartered in Baltimore, wrote to Colin Tarbert, the city's deputy mayor for the Offices of Economic and Neighborhood Development.

"That said," Cordish wrote, "a VISIBLE presence of leadership walking the streets, the Mayor arm and arm w business, clergy and political leadership would go a long way."

The emails show that Rawlings-Blake communicated her wishes directly to deputies over email.

On May 4, she wrote to Batts and other top officials to ensure the police were reviewing video from looting at Mondawmin.

"Good morning," Rawlings-Blake wrote. "I spoke to the general manager of Mondawmin mall yesterday. She says that she has not been contacted by the police department yet to get the videotapes that they have from the parking lot and from various stores of the looters. Now that the dust has settled a little bit I want to make sure that we are working on that this week. Thanks."

Batts responded: "On it."

He followed up later, telling Rawlings-Blake and others, "Our next steps to identify looters and rock throwers. Tasked Kevin Davis [then deputy commissioner] with that yesterday. We are on it Mayor."

Rawlings-Blake fired Batts July 8 and named Davis interim police commissioner.

Records show that Rawlings-Blake and Hogan disagreed about when to lift the city's curfew.

In the emails between Parthemos and the leader of a downtown business group, Parthemos says the mayor wanted the

curfew lifted on Saturday, May 2.

Hogan "was adamantly [against] it," Parthemos wrote.

"Mayor will lift tomorrow [Sunday] after security briefing tomorrow if intel indicates all is good ..." Parthemos wrote in a late-night email. "She wanted to tonight but for security reasons could not. Was long discussion with city police and state partners."

The curfew, which barred people from being on city streets between 10 p.m. and 5 a.m., was lifted on Sunday, May 3.

Doug Mayer, a spokesman for Hogan, confirmed that Parthemos' email was accurate.

"Throughout the unrest, Governor Hogan's main priority was the safety of the citizens of Baltimore," Mayer said. "The curfew had proven effective and the governor saw no reason to lift it prematurely."

Examples of Rawlings-Blake's response to the crisis can be found throughout the emails and documents. She organized two conference calls with business leaders in the days leading up to the rioting.

One call was set for April 26, a day after vandals clashed with police near [Oriole Park at Camden Yards](#), and the day before the riots. Her staff asked business leaders to call in so Rawlings-Blake "may update you and other business leaders on the Freddie Gray protests held yesterday and what steps are being taken to ensure public safety and the least amount of disruption to downtown businesses."

Batts, too, wrote to a supporter that day saying police had restrained themselves during the vandalism Saturday but planned to get tougher.

"In short, because this was a protest against the Baltimore Police Department. We couldn't be seen as the aggressors or instigators, as such we needed to give them space," Batts said. "Going forward we will tighten up the reins on the marches to ensure everyone's safety."

City officials compiled a spreadsheet listing of suspicious posts on Twitter and other social media from the day of the riots.

Social media posts claiming that high school students would take place in a "purge" — a period of lawlessness — helped fuel tensions ahead of the violence.

The spreadsheet lists 71 posts described as either "threats" or "chatter." It is not clear why those posts were included on the list, who added them to the list or how the information was used.

Some posts contained information that officials believed would incite violence against police officers. But the reason why other posts were tracked is less obvious — one, for example, had an Internet link to quick medical procedures for protesters.

A 40-page "civil disturbance" operations plan was included in the documents, but much of it was redacted. The document shows that police prepared the plan for May 1 and May 2, when the agency warned there could be "large scale public mass demonstrations."

"The demonstration may have elements contained within which turn violent and destructive," the document said. "This may result in widespread assaults on citizens and police officers, looting, vandalism, and arson. The resources of the Baltimore City Police and Fire Departments will be taxed far beyond the ability to be met by normal or enhanced staffing levels."

The document contains maps and deployment assignments, most of them redacted. One page lists "Rioters Most

Dangerous Course of Action," and "Rioters Most Likely Course of Action." Both sections were blacked out.

The emails contained a breakdown on the number of protesters arrested in the days leading up to the rioting and immediately following. The most arrested was 131 on April 28; 125 were arrested April 27.

The next-largest number of protesters arrested was 64 on April 30, followed by 53 on May 2 and 49 on May 1.

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