

Make Ticketmaster Play by the Rules Now – and Thank Me for the Extra Revenue for the City Later

Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake can thank me later. I've found a way to generate more than \$500,000 in revenue for the city of Baltimore this year, and all the mayor has to do is follow city law.

Astonishingly, amid recent reports of Baltimore's fiscal crisis, the mayor is prepared to ignore this source of vitally needed revenue – to help a struggling little company called Ticketmaster.

In early February, Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake called for a series of financial reforms including a “user fee” for trash-pick up and increasing the work shifts for city firefighters to reduce a \$750 million projected city deficit.

Yet, Mayor Rawlings-Blake has an opportunity to collect money from a corporation rather than from beleaguered city residents. Will she take it? Right now, it seems unlikely.

Recently, Maryland's highest court found in the case of *Bourgeois v. Live Nation et. al.* that charging service fees (or anything more than the price printed on the ticket) violates Baltimore's long-standing scalping ordinances. Each violation carries a \$1,000 penalty. Simply by enforcing this law, Mayor Rawlings-Blake could collect \$500,000 in fines to support needed services for city residents.

Needless to say, Ticketmaster and the Lyric Theater (which collects a portion of the service charge Ticketmaster adds to each ticket) are unhappy with the court's decision. Soon after the decision, Mayor Rawlings-Blake asked the City Council for a bill (13-0194) that would allow Ticketmaster to continue business as usual. Yet, while Ticketmaster will get a free pass under this bill, individuals will continue to be prosecuted under the scalping ordinance.

At a Feb. 14 hearing, City Council members from the Land Use and Taxation Committee agreed to postpone a decision until Feb. 28.

Ticketmaster, like other ticket providers, provides a valuable service -- enabling theater-goers to easily purchase seats to their favorite events. However, Ticketmaster can continue to operate in Baltimore under existing law as long as it provides all-in-one pricing -- one price for the ticket with no added fees. Ticketmaster can get paid out of the price of the ticket, just as so many businesses are paid out of the price of the products they help sell.

And Mayor Rawlings-Blake can collect a substantial sum from this corporate giant by simply enforcing Baltimore law and collecting the penalties due to the city for Ticketmaster's violations of its scalping ordinance. And take this excellent opportunity to demonstrate that no one (corporation or person) is above the law.