

OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL
CITY OF BALTIMORE



Isabel Mercedes Cumming
Inspector General

Investigative
Report Synopsis

OIG Case # 25-0013-I

Issued: June 11, 2025



OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL
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City Hall, Suite 635
100 N. Holliday Street
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June 11, 2025

Dear Citizens of Baltimore City,

The mission of the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) is to promote accountability, efficiency, and integrity in City of Baltimore (City) government and investigate complaints of fraud, financial waste, and abuse.

During a prior investigation, the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) learned the Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement (MONSE) purchased Slack Technologies, LLC. (Slack), a third-party messaging software, with a City procurement card (P-Card). During the investigation, the OIG obtained information that indicates the Baltimore City Health Department (BCHD) also utilizes Slack. City agencies reporting their use of all third-party communication methods to the Baltimore City Information and Technology (BCIT) for approval and configuration, as well to the Law Department for awareness, could strengthen the ability to provide complete information to the public.

BACKGROUND

According to information available on the State of Maryland Attorney General's website, the Maryland Public Information Act (MPIA) gives the public the right to access government records without unnecessary cost and delay.¹ Penalties for noncompliance with the MPIA include fees, litigation costs, and potential criminal action if a person knowingly or willfully violates the act.²

Baltimore City Information and Technology (BCIT) provides many different technological services. BCIT manages the City's access to applications, such as Microsoft Outlook, an email platform, and Microsoft Teams, an instant messaging platform. This includes creating, assigning, and managing the security settings of Microsoft profiles. Additionally, BCIT maintains the retention of employee email records, which are stored on servers for a limited period. Elected officials' and department heads' emails are stored for longer.

The Department of Finance's Bureau of Procurement established and manages the Procurement Card Program. Procurement cards (P-Card) are utilized by approved City employees and act like credit cards in the direct purchase of goods and services. City employees must have an approved Procurement Card Program Waiver Request when applicable. Due to MONSE purchasing a software subscription, MONSE also had to request BCIT approval to use the P-Card.

Slack is a cloud-based platform for instant messaging, content sharing, and integration with other programs. Slack has multiple subscription tiers that offer additional features and security protection.

Microsoft Teams is the City-wide messaging and collaboration tool that is available on City-issued computers and mobile devices. The Microsoft o365 subscription licensing utilized by the City to support agencies includes full access to Microsoft Teams and does not require additional licensing. City-wide usage of Microsoft Teams began in 2020.

¹ https://www.marylandattorneygeneral.gov/OpenGov%20Documents/Appendix_I.pdf

² <https://dsd.maryland.gov/Pages/COMARHome.aspx>

REPORT FRAUD, WASTE AND ABUSE

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INVESTIGATION

MONSE's Use of Slack & BCIT Approval

In October 2021, a former MONSE Associate Director of Finance (Former MONSE AD) contacted the Department of Finance (DOF) regarding a declined charge for Slack on a P-Card. A DOF employee advised the Former MONSE AD that new restrictions placed on P-Cards went into effect and that a waiver explaining the charge would need to be submitted. The Former MONSE AD was informed in November 2021 that a second waiver approved by the Baltimore City Office of Information Technology (BCIT) would be required if the charge was for a technical service or software product.

On December 3, 2021, the Former MONSE AD emailed BCIT Procurement requesting to use the P-Card to pay for Slack subscriptions. The former BCIT Chief Information Security Officer (Former BCIT CISO) forwarded the email to other BCIT employees and asked if MONSE was on BCIT's supported network and why MONSE would need Slack to communicate. The BCIT Chief of Staff (BCIT COS) responded and confirmed that MONSE is in the City's network.

BCIT requested additional information from the Former MONSE AD regarding the justification for MONSE's business needs for Slack. BCIT asked for more context about why Slack membership was needed and why the City's communication platforms did not meet MONSE's needs. The Former MONSE AD replied that MONSE utilizes workspaces in Slack that allow for collaboration between MONSE and community members. The Former MONSE AD alleged that Microsoft Teams does not allow MONSE to invite people outside the City to collaborate.

The Former MONSE AD wrote to BCIT that because MONSE's work in gun violence prevention and reduction is community-oriented, there is a need to collaborate daily. However, during their later OIG interview, the Former MONSE AD said that Slack was only used for internal MONSE communications and not with community members. The Former MONSE AD explained that the former MONSE Director preferred utilizing Slack over Microsoft Teams.

BCIT approved the request through the calendar year 2022 but said that MONSE would need to contact BCIT for renewal or replacement. The OIG did not find any evidence that MONSE submitted a renewal request. The BCIT and P-Card waivers were approved in December 2021 and January 2022 respectively.

According to a weekly Slack summary notification reviewed, MONSE team members sent 2,517 messages and uploaded 258 files during a one-week period. The OIG reviewed MONSE's P-Card statements and found that the total amount the City paid for the Slack subscription between July 2021 and December 2024 was \$12,156.43.

BCHD's Use of Slack

During the investigation, the OIG learned that multiple Baltimore City Health Department (BCHD) employees also appeared to be utilizing Slack.

BCHD's Chief of Staff (BCHD COS) stated that BCHD employees began using a free Slack account before the City transitioned to Microsoft Teams and used Slack during the Covid-19 pandemic. According to the BCHD COS, they will be deactivating the BCHD Slack account in the near future. Additionally, BCHD's Tuberculosis program and Maternal and Infant Care program uses WhatsApp with clients and

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one staff Maternal and Child Health member uses Signal. BCHD provided an alternate video platform disclosure form for clients.

BCIT Concerns & Slack Subscription Info

During their interview, a Senior BCIT Employee (Sr. BCIT Employee) said utilizing Slack does not allow BCIT to maintain a software backup if an electronic discovery³ request is made. For example, BCIT is unable to pull conversation logs and other data that may be subject to a legal request. According to the Sr. BCIT Employee’s recollection, the City’s Microsoft Teams software is as much a collaboration tool as Slack. Third-party software would include Signal, WhatsApp, Slack, or other similar communication programs. The City’s Technology Acceptable Use Policy states the City is a steward of all of its data, and sensitive and protected data authorized for distribution outside of City IT resources shall be transmitted over encrypted communication channels.

Communication in Slack is maintained and stored for a duration of time that is dependent on the tier of the user’s subscription. BCHD reported utilizing the free version of Slack, while MONSE appeared to utilize the Pro version. The free version of Slack maintains 90 days of communication history, while other subscriptions have more options and data protections available (Figure 1).⁴ Two plans provide more options and security than the Pro plan. The Enterprise Grid offers the most security and data compliance options, including audit logs, data loss prevention⁵, legal holds, data exports for all messages, and support for HIPAA compliance.

Figure 1: Slack plan comparison from Slack website

	Free GET STARTED	Pro GET STARTED	Business+ GET STARTED	Enterprise Grid TALK TO SALES
Productivity and collaboration				
Message and file history	90-day access	✓	✓	✓
Slack huddles	1:1 only	✓	✓	✓
Audio and video clips	✓	✓	✓	✓
Work with external people	1:1 only	✓	✓	✓
Slack canvases	Channels and DMs only	✓	✓	✓
Slack lists		✓	✓	✓
Templates		User-created	User-created	Admin-created
Customizable sections		✓	✓	✓
Slack Atlas			Add-on	✓
Slack AI		Add-on	Add-on	Add-on includes enterprise search

³ Electronic discovery is the process of identifying and preserving electronically stored information for legal proceedings.

⁴ <https://slack.com/pricing>

⁵ Data loss prevention is a “security solution that identifies and helps prevent unsafe or inappropriate sharing, transfer, or use of sensitive data.”

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Security				
Data encryption at rest and in transit	✓	✓	✓	✓
Two-factor authentication	✓	✓	✓	✓
OAuth with Google		✓	✓	✓
SAML-based single sign-on (SSO)			✓	Supports Multi-SAML
Slack Enterprise Key Management				Add-on
Integration with Enterprise Mobility Management (EMM)				✓
Audit logs				✓
Identity provider (IDP) groups				✓
Compliance				
Custom retention policies for messages and files		✓	✓	✓
Data exports for all messages			✓	✓
Support for HIPAA compliance				✓
Data residency			✓	✓
Native data loss prevention (DLP) for Slack Connect				✓
Information barriers				✓
Legal holds				✓

Records Retention

During the investigation, the OIG reviewed City record retention schedules posted on the Maryland State Archives Central Repository but did not find evidence of any schedules created by MONSE or MONSE’s former name, the Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice.⁶ The OIG requested a six-month period of Slack messages for multiple MONSE employees, which MONSE provided after the OIG was requested to send a subpoena.

The OIG also learned that not all City agencies have active record retention schedules. The Maryland State Archives provides guidance on record retention to state, county, and local governments.⁷ On the City’s website, the City has Administrative Manual policies regarding records management from 2004 and 2010 that the OIG learned are no longer current. The City Code, Article 1, Subtitle 10, is the governing law regarding records management.

The OIG reviewed a letter from the former Chief Solicitor letter dated April 2022, addressed to all members of the Baltimore City government. The letter provided guidance on the importance of agencies properly retaining records, detailed what a record is, and listed common examples of records. One of the examples listed in the letter is WhatsApp, another third-party communication software.

⁶ <https://guide.msa.maryland.gov/pages/series.aspx?ID=SE160>

⁷ https://msa.maryland.gov/msa/intromsa/html/record_mgmt/toc.html

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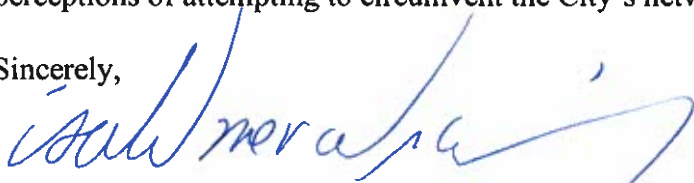
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OIG FINDINGS

The investigation revealed that MONSE and BCHD do utilize a third-party communications provider, Slack. To obtain BCIT's approval to use Slack, MONSE claimed it would be used to communicate with the community. However, according to the evidence gathered, Slack appears to have only been used for internal MONSE correspondence. The City has provided Microsoft Teams as the communication and collaboration platform for internal agency correspondence and meetings since 2020. The OIG found that the City has paid \$12,156.43 for MONSE's Slack subscription between July 2021 and December 2024. BCHD reported they will be deactivating their Slack account in the near future.

The OIG found that BCIT staff expressed concerns with Slack and other third-party software, specifically regarding the availability, storage, and management of the transmitted communications and data. The OIG recommends that the City prohibit City agencies from using third-party communication software such as Slack, WhatsApp, and Signal without BCIT's approval and configurations for best practices. Using these applications without BCIT's approval and expertise and Law Department's awareness, could lead to data loss, record retention issues, potential MPIOA noncompliance, reduced government transparency, and perceptions of attempting to circumvent the City's network.

Sincerely,



Isabel Mercedes Cumming
Inspector General

CC: Hon. Brandon M. Scott, Mayor of Baltimore City
Hon. Zeke Cohen, Baltimore City Council President
Hon. Bill Henry, Baltimore City Comptroller
Honorable Members of the Baltimore City Council
Hon. Ebony Thompson, Baltimore City Solicitor