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# Proposed grading system concerns some restaurateurs

## *Bill would post health inspection grades on restaurant doors*

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### **BALTIMORE -**

Some Baltimore restaurateurs are worried about how they'll be treated if a new ratings system is approved.

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Baltimore soon could join other cities that use a grading system of restaurants that puts a report card on a restaurant's door.

The city's restaurants have long been subject to inspections, but a public grading system based on what inspectors find would be new. Some are concerned about whether the city's Health Department has the resources to manage a new system fairly.

At Pete's Grill in Waverly, owner Dave Stahl has seen enough city inspections to know no two health inspectors are alike.

"I have health inspectors come in who are tough as nails and I have other ones who come in here and actually ask me to walk around and tell me to look at the temperatures in my refrigerator and tell them what the thermometers read rather than checking it themselves, so there is an extremely wide variation I find in the extent to which the detail to which these inspectors go," Stahl said.

It's one reason Stahl is concerned about the bill before the City Council. If passed, inspectors won't just write up violations, which they currently do. They'll use a new software system that scores the restaurant. A top score is excellent, followed by good, then fair, which is the lowest score without being shut down. The grade will then be posted on the restaurant's door.

Of concern to the restaurant industry, if a less-than-excellent score gets posted, it may take a while for a restaurant to get re-inspected and graded again.

"I don't frankly believe there are enough health inspectors on the street to re-inspect these non-critical violations in a timely manner," Stahl said.

Since fiscal year 2011, the number of food inspectors in the Health Department has dropped from 23 to 18.

Two different audits criticized the department's inspection effort. One audit completed in 2007 said the department's inspections weren't performed with the frequency specified by state and city regulations.

A 2013 audit also cited as a deficiency inspection frequencies.

The WBAL-TV 11 News I-Team's review of cases shows the Health Department re-inspects quickly if a restaurant has been shut down. But under the proposed system, if a restaurant just gets downgraded, the city health commissioner admits that it may have to wait months to get re-inspected and graded again, regardless of how quickly it corrects the problem.

"We visit our restaurants on a trimester basis, so at least three times a year, and so that sign could be up for that period of time. We believe that is a fair process," Health Commissioner Dr. Leana Wen said.

The first version of the bill required re-inspections with seven days. That provision is gone in the current amended bill. The City Council is set to take up the proposal Monday night.

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