

State of Maryland

Commission on Civil Rights

“Our vision is to have a State that is free from any trace of unlawful discrimination.”



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February 9, 2021

House Bill 670 – Police Reform and Accountability Act of 2021 **POSITION: Support**

Dear Chairperson Clippinger, Vice Chairperson Atterbeary, and Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

The Maryland Commission on Civil Rights (“MCCR”; “The Commission”) is the State agency responsible for the enforcement of laws prohibiting discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodations, and state contracts based upon race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, marital status, familial status, sexual orientation, gender identity, genetic information, physical and mental disability, and source of income.

The Maryland Commission on Civil Rights wants to thank the House Workgroup to Address Police Reform and Accountability in Maryland for their diligent work as they conducted hearings to gather information and testimony throughout 2020. The 12 recommendations contained in their final report issued in December, 2020, are comprehensive steps toward achieving meaningful police reform and accountability formulated in consultation with stakeholders from all background throughout Maryland.

The necessity for across-the-board law enforcement reform in Maryland came to the public forefront with the death of Freddie Gray in police custody in April, 2015. Prior to that, Eric Garner of New York died in 2014 after he was wrestled to the ground and choked by a police officer after being arrested on suspicion of illegally selling cigarettes. That same year Michael Brown of Ferguson, Missouri, was shot six times – despite being unarmed – by police who responded to reports that he had allegedly committed petty theft. And in 2020, George Floyd of Minneapolis died after being arrested and held down by police officers, one of whom had his knee on Mr. Floyd's neck while Mr. Floyd pleaded that he could not breathe. These are merely three examples of a long list of individuals, especially Black and African American men, whose lives were senselessly stolen from them by a broken system. We must, as a state, demand better from those sworn to protect and serve us.

Eliminating the issuance of “no-knock” warrants except in instances where there is clear and convincing evidence that the life or safety of the executing officer or another person may be endangered will go a long way in mitigating the potential for a situation, such as the one resulting in Breonna Taylor death, from happening in Maryland.

Repealing the Law Enforcement Officers' Bill of Rights and starting anew will allow for lawmakers, law enforcement officials, and communities to come together in a fresh start to adopt meaningful and effective reforms that adequately balance the protection of the community with the needs of those officers sworn to protect it.

Establishing protocols to identify and address officers who pose a danger to themselves or others, as well as to hold officers who commit misconduct accountable, will proactively work to guarantee that only those who are fit to serve are able to do so.

Requiring that all officers, whether new or otherwise, receive uniform training on necessary topics, such as use of force/de-escalation and implicit bias, will commence addressing directly those systemic practices and cultures that put entire communities at risk of harm and death.

Mandating uniform Rules of Accountability for all law enforcement agencies throughout Maryland creates consistency across a system whose policies are currently patchwork, while preventing officers who engage in misconduct from being able to hide behind their badge in an effort to remain in the line of duty.

These are just some of the incredibly important, and in some instances common sense, provisions included in HB670. The Maryland Commission on Civil Rights believes that now is the time for us all to come together in a concerted effort to begin dismantling and eliminating the lingering vestiges of structural racism and discrimination that have plagued our law enforcement and justice systems for decades. Every individual is presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law, and no individual deserves to lose their life by extra-judicial means when they are not an active threat to anyone's safety. Maryland can no longer afford to wait to enact comprehensive reform.

For these reasons and more, the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights strongly urges a favorable vote on HB670. Thank you for your time and consideration of the information contained in this letter. The Maryland Commission on Civil Rights looks forward to the continued opportunity to work with you to improve and promote civil rights in Maryland.