

## SUPPORT SB 626 - POLICE USE-OF-FORCE BILL

MARYLAND ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE REFORM  
Working to end unnecessary incarceration and build strong, safe communities



351 Dubois Road, Annapolis, Md. 21409

Testimony of Phil Caroom for MAJR exec.com.

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The recent murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police was one of the most clearly-documented modern atrocities in the name of law enforcement. Widespread protests and disturbances rightly have resulted. The killing of Freddie Gray by Baltimore Police in 2015 led to riots but, unfortunately, not to system-wide change at that time.

These cases—and so many others-- are among many hundreds of reported killings of citizens by U.S. police officers each year- with African Americans more than twice as likely to be killed in this manner than whites.

Beyond the police killings, unequal patterns of arrest culminate in incarceration of African Americans at a rate 5.1 times greater than that of white Americans, although studies of drug involvement and traffic violations suggest the underlying behavior is quite similar. While police policies create only one part of Maryland's criminal justice racial disparities, their role is a key one.

Police policies -- permitting use of deadly force, racial profiling, “broken windows” policing, etc.-- aren't written into our statutes. They currently are part of police academy training, department policies and customs adopted over the years without public input.

Other 2021 bills make general reference to restricting “use of force” and leave its implementation to police authorities, but only HB 139 / SB 626 wisely offers explicit guidance to police authorities:

-“Lethal force” is defined to include firearms discharges, taser use, chokeholds, and knee-drops directed at citizens.

-“De-escalation” and “reasonable alternatives,” with specific listed examples, are included.

-“Imminent threat” is given an objective standard, rather than one based primarily on an officer's fears.

Why are such specifics needed? Current, fear-based policing tactics with insufficient legislative oversight have led to the recurring tragedy of unnecessary killing of civilians.

For all these reasons, Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform strongly urges adoption of HB 139 / SB 626.

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*Please note: 1) Another version of this testimony including links to supporting resources is available at <https://www.ma4jr.org/legislation-2021/>.*

*2) This testimony is offered for Md. Alliance for Justice Reform ([www.ma4jr.org](http://www.ma4jr.org)), not for the Md. Judiciary.*