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Written Testimony Senate Bill 482 – Whistleblower Protections

A few short days ago, I testified in front of this Honorable Committee on the duty to report misconduct, a bill proposed by Senator Sydnor. During that testimony, I referred to the historically detrimental blue code of silence that law enforcement officers are encouraged not to break. And I told you that any law enforcement officer who would stand here today and tell you that the blue code of silence doesn't exist is simply not telling you the truth.

Few would know this code of silence better than former Baltimore Police Officer Joe Crystal. On October 27, 2011, Crystal and his colleagues were getting ready to end their shift, when they decided to make one more arrest. As they honed in on Antoine Green, a suspected drug dealer, Mr. Green fled and entered what he thought was a vacant row house, only to find the girlfriend of an off-duty Baltimore Police Officer, Anthony Williams, seated inside. After some time passed, the officers arrested Mr. Green -- whose case in its entirety was ultimately dismissed -- and called for a paddy wagon to take him down to the station. But when Williams, who was off-duty, showed up at his girlfriend's apartment, the officers ordered the paddy wagon driver to return to the scene. Williams and his colleague, Sgt. Mariano Gialamas, then beat Mr. Green senseless.

Crystal, an ambitious and heroic officer, reported the brutality the next day. While Williams and Gialamas were ultimately criminally convicted, Mr. Crystal went on to be crucified. He was called a rat, he was intimidated, reassigned and eventually, per a lawsuit he filed against the BPD, forced to resign. The culminating event occurred one morning, when Crystal exited the home that he shared with his wife, and discovered a dead and bloody rat jammed under the wiper of his windshield.

It is not enough to wish for a change in culture, it's time require it. Perhaps if we'd done so earlier, good officers, ones who received commendations and awards like Officer Joe Crystal, would still be here, and those who intimidate, use brutality and live by the mantra "what happens in the family stays in the family," would be long gone. As an aside, Joe Crystal recently won the Leo Foundations' Officer of the Year award for the entire state of Florida, it's a shame these protections were not in place to keep him here, protecting the citizens of Maryland.