



Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland

Testimony in Support of HB 670 - Police Reform and Accountability Act of 2021

TO: Chairman Clippinger and Members of the House Judiciary Committee

FROM: Stephen C. Buckingham, Chair,
Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland.

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Unitarian Universalists affirm the inherent worth and dignity of every person, promote justice, equity and compassion in human relations, and seek a world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all. These principles are the lens through which we examine the institutions our State has developed to protect its people from harm and maintain safe communities.

For too long, our systems of law enforcement, prosecution and judicial decisions have been weighted against the poor and people of color. The deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and others this past year has brought home to many just how unfair and oppressive policing has been for communities of color. It is, therefore, necessary to transform policing practices as part of a larger effort to address issues of racial justice.

HB 670 contains many of the provisions needed to begin this long-overdue transition. The legislation addresses policing from three directions:

- Before officers interact with people, they must:
 - Not have a history of misconduct or excessive force in a previous law enforcement position
 - Have initial and periodic mental health screenings or assessments
 - Have training that specifically includes: implicit bias, clear use-of-force policies and methods of de-escalation, and
 - Sign a pledge to respect every human life and act with compassion.
- While engaging with the public, officers must:
 - Meet clear standards on the use of force
 - Never use chokeholds,
 - Intervene if witnessing other police using excessive force, and
 - Render aid to anyone injured by police action
- Whenever there is an incident involving use of force, there must be:
 - Response to the scene immediately by supervisors to gather information
 - Documentation by all involved in the incident
 - Investigation of police shootings or civilian injury by an independent agency

- No impediment or delay in investigations resulting from the current Law Enforcement Officers' Bill of Rights (LEOBOR should be repealed)
- An administrative hearing process that has significant civilian participation, and
- Reporting of data on incidents made to a state agency.

We must recognize that certain practices must change if our law enforcement is to live into its motto to "serve and protect" everyone. The provisions of HB 670 will go a long way towards assuring that people with the proper qualifications and attitudes are retained as law enforcement officers, that they are governed by clear policies to protect both officers and the public, and that any incidents of harm receive prompt and objective investigation and administrative hearings when appropriate.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on House Bill 670.

Stephen C. Buckingham

Lay Community Minister and Chair
Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland