

Written Testimony of Danielle Veith  
SUPPORT HB 670

TO: Chairman Luke Clippinger, Vice-Chair Vanessa Atterbeary, and Members of the House Judiciary Committee

FROM: Danielle Veith, Kensington, MD (District 18)

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Thank you, Chairman, Vice-Chair, and members of the Committee, for the opportunity to share my views with you. My name is Danielle Veith, and I live in Kensington, in District 18. On behalf of the Maryland Chapter of Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America, I would like to express our support for House Speaker Adrienne Jones's legislation, HB 670, the Police Reform and Accountability Act of 2021.

Every year, police in America shoot and kill more than 1,000 people, and Black people are three times as likely as white people to be the victims. Police violence is gun violence—92 percent of people killed by police in Maryland are killed with guns. We can't end gun violence without real police reform.

That's why our volunteers are committed to standing with the coalition of civil rights and community groups to advocate for comprehensive legislation to address police use of force and ensure transparency and accountability in misconduct investigations. We believe the use of any physical force by police should be limited to situations in which it is necessary to make an arrest. Deadly force should only be used to prevent an imminent death or serious bodily harm. Officers should never use more force than is absolutely necessary and only when non-violent methods have been exhausted. And civilians should be included in oversight of law enforcement and investigations into allegations of misconduct in a meaningful way.

Importantly, the Police Reform and Accountability Act would create a statewide standard for the use of force by law enforcement. It would only allow for the use of deadly force when it's necessary to protect the officer or someone else from an imminent threat of death or serious injury, require law enforcement to attempt de-escalation before using force, and provide for training on the appropriate use of force. It would establish a duty to intervene to stop a fellow officer from using excessive force, as well as a ban on chokeholds and on armored military surplus vehicles. It would also require all law enforcement agencies in the state to mandate the use of body-worn cameras by or before January 1, 2025.

This legislation would narrow the circumstances in which law enforcement can request a no-knock search warrant. Under current law, an officer can get a no-knock warrant if they present some evidence that knocking would either give the targets of the warrant time to destroy evidence or endanger the lives of officers or third parties. This bill would eliminate the risk of destruction of evidence as a justification for issuing a no-knock warrant and place a heavier burden on the officers seeking no-knock warrants by requiring them to show by clear and convincing evidence that the no-knock entry is required to protect life and safety.

HB670 also strengthens the state law that requires law enforcement agencies to develop early intervention policies for problem officers. Establishing a system to identify officers who are at risk of using excessive force so they could then be retrained or otherwise dealt with to prevent future abuses. It would also establish independent investigative agencies, separate from law enforcement, to investigate all officer-involved shootings and police uses of force that result in death or serious injury, requiring the details of those cases to be shared with the public. It creates a new process for investigating and disciplining police officers that is transparent and that includes civilians in the process.

Repeals MD's LEBOR law, as discussed previously, MD's LEBOR law has several features that make it extremely difficult to investigate and hold accountable officers who commit acts of misconduct. This bill would repeal the LEBOR law entirely but sets up a slightly different replacement scheme than Senate bill (SB 627). More on that below.

For testimony purposes, I'd lean into the repeal of LEBOR and the many bad features of that law rather than commenting on this new scheme.

Also included in this legislation is a plan to incorporate civilians into the Maryland Police Training and Standards Commission, which has wide-ranging responsibilities related to the training and certification of officers and police training schools statewide and would give non-officers greater input in the standards and trainings mandated by the Commission.

Expands the authority of the Commission. The bill also gives the Commission a number of new responsibilities, including: 1) monitoring whether law enforcement agencies are complying with the new use of force standards (see below); 2) mandatory revocation of the certification of any law enforcement officer who violates the use of force policy, is convicted of a felony or perjury or who resigned or was fired amid a previous investigation into alleged misconduct. The bill would also require the Commission to establish a database of officers who are decertified for illegal use of force. It would also require regular training and testing on implicit bias.

When George Floyd called out for his mother, every mother heard him. I'm here today, on behalf of thousands of mothers and others, to say: we can't end gun violence without police reform. Police violence is gun violence—92 percent of people killed by police in Maryland are killed with guns—and we must fight the toxic combination of systemic racism, America's gun culture and the militarization of law enforcement.

As the mother of Amadou Diallo said recently, when George Floyd called out for his mother, "every mother heard him." That's why I'm here today, on behalf of thousands of mothers and others from Moms Demand Action, to call for a law enforcement and justice system that's fair for all of our children.

We look forward to working with members of the working group and our community partners to ensure that our state does everything in its power to combat police violence. Thank you.