



Debra Gardner, Legal Director
Public Justice Center
201 North Charles Street, Suite 1200
Baltimore, Maryland 21201
410-625-9409, ext 228
gardnerd@publicjustice.org

SB 626

Law Enforcement Officers – Use of Force Hearing before the House Judiciary Committee, March 25, 2021 Position: **SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS**

The Public Justice Center (PJC) supports SB 626 with amendments as a critical component of police accountability, transparency, and reform that is long overdue.

True police reform, the need for which can no longer be denied, cannot be accomplished without directly confronting the systemic overuse of force.

The Maryland Coalition for Justice and Police Accountability seeks five critical reforms, and clear, sensible regulation of the use of force is one of those critical pillars. During recent years the over-policing of Black and brown communities and the unjustified killings of countless individuals in Maryland and across the nation have been exposed by heinous example after horrid tragedy. The lack of legal limits on the use of force, lack of training in effective de-escalation techniques, and lack of a requirement that officers report instances of excessive force by others have all played deadly roles in those nightmarish events. As a result, even in the clearest of cases, the perpetrators have avoided justice altogether.

Don't pass an unconstitutional bill. Amend SB 626 to conform to HB 139. Without limiting the use of force, clearly defining in context what excessive force is, and requiring training and oversight, there can be no rebuilding of trust and cooperation between the public and those sworn to protect and serve.

The great majority of other states have a use of force law. Maryland cannot afford to stay behind. **But the bill must rein in police use of force, not expand and sanction it.**

The PJC is a non-profit legal advocacy organization dedicated to racial equity and ending poverty. Its Prisoners Rights Project seeks basic justice through reform in our criminal justice system and an end to all unnecessary detention and incarceration. Real police reform is critical to achieving those goals.

The PJC urges a FAVORABLE REPORT WITH AMENDMENTS on SB 626. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Debra Gardner, Legal Director, at gardnerd@publicjustice.org or 410 625 9409 ext 228.