

Hearing: March 3, 2023

Claire Landers  
Baltimore, MD 21209



**TESTIMONY ON SB747 - POSITION: UNFAVORABLE**  
**Public Information Act - Personnel Records - Police Officers**

**TO:** Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee  
**FROM:** Claire Landers, on behalf of Jews United for Justice (JUFJ)

My name is Claire Landers and I am a resident of District 11 in Baltimore County. On behalf of Jews United for Justice (JUFJ), I am submitting this testimony in opposition to SB747, Public Information Act - Personnel Records - Police Officers. JUFJ organizes 6,000 Jewish Marylanders and allies from across the state in support of social, racial, and economic justice campaigns.

My grandfather was a police lieutenant in the Boston Police Department. I grew up with police officers as neighbors and family friends with whom we enjoyed backyard parties and camping trips. I was comfortable around police officers, in and out of uniform. But this comfort was questioned when an unarmed teenager in our community was shot and killed by an officer in a local park. After this horrific incident, my parents advised my teenage brother: "If you are ever pulled over by a cop, do whatever they say. You don't know what could happen." Their warning speaks to a rabbinic teaching in Judaism that every human contains both a *yetzer ha'tov* (an inclination to do good) and a *yetzer ha'rah* (an inclination to do evil). In this vein, my parents helped my brother and me recognize that police departments are made up of individuals who exhibit the full range of human impulses and behaviors, from the very best — the officers we grew up with — to the very worst — the officer who killed our neighbor. For the good and evil we do, I learned, we are accountable to both God and our community.

I watched Sgt. Wayne Jenkins be held accountable to our community during his trial for the abuse, misconduct, and criminality he committed as leader of the Baltimore Police Department. I was shocked to learn that during his first two years as an officer, a full decade before he joined the Gun Trace Task Force (GTTF), Jenkins was the subject of multiple misconduct complaints that were ignored and/or buried by BPD supervisors and the internal affairs division via the department's own internal oversight and record keeping process. It is our duty to ask: What enormous damage might have been prevented if Jenkins' early misconduct contained in his internal disciplinary records had been accessible to public scrutiny? What if the GTTF and complicit BPD officers had been unable to rely on Maryland's unique restrictions around personnel records to "game the system" and fearlessly continue their brazen lawlessness?

Jenkins' trial and so many other accounts of police abuse have made abundantly clear that when officers engage in such patterns of misconduct, they not only directly harm their victims, but also cause long-term societal damage, particularly within Black and brown communities. The passage of Anton's Law in 2021 was an inspiring response from both chambers of the General Assembly toward removing restrictions to law enforcement's personnel records, repairing the public's basic trust in and regard for law enforcement, enhancing police departments' ability to deliver on public safety according to best practices, and advancing police accountability in our state. This crucial legislation brought Maryland up to speed with other states that already had authorized some public access around police officer disciplinary records. Anton's Law reflected, or at least seemed to, that we had arrived at a general consensus that residents who file complaints about officer abuse and misconduct deserve to learn whether their complaints have been addressed and how they will be resolved. Our state absolutely must not undo this progress by categorizing disciplinary records as "personnel files," nor rebuild the impenetrable wall of bureaucratic, legal secrecy around investigations into police misconduct.

Passing SB747 would undermine the ability of Anton's Law to meaningfully respond to widespread public demand for greater transparency, oversight and accountability over taxpayer-funded police departments.

On behalf of Jews United for Justice, I thank you for the opportunity to share our position and respectfully urge this committee to return an unfavorable report on **SB747**.