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**Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
February 1, 2023**

Subject: SB126– “Freedom to Serve” Support

From: Victor V. Brito, Chief of Police

Chair and members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee, I am Victor Brito, Chief of Police of the Rockville City Police Department. The Rockville City Police Department serves approximately 70,000 residents in the City of Rockville and is the county seat for Montgomery County and its largest municipality. The Rockville City Police Department is a 66-member sworn agency who is committed to providing effective, fair, impartial, and unbiased community policing that serves the expectations of the law and community members who call the City of Rockville home. Our agency is committed to building and maintaining trust, in partnership with the Rockville community.

The Rockville City Police Department supports SB126 because one of the most significant crises in the history of American law enforcement is the hiring and retention of qualified police officers. Not only locally, regionally, and nationally, this hiring crisis has affected police agencies throughout the State of Maryland. Agencies, like the Rockville City Police Department, must be able to look at other methods to attract and hire qualified individuals who are willing and able to serve as law enforcement officers. The passing of SB126 will increase the pool of police officer applicants as well as provide the much-needed diversity and skill sets needed to help continue to strengthen our partnership with our community.

The Rockville City Police Department has experienced the “Great Resignation,” because of the pandemic and the current negative stigma attached to the law enforcement policing profession. At one time our agency saw the highest number of vacancies ever experienced in the department’s history – with many officers opting to retire early or move on to careers outside of law enforcement. Our agency is in a competitive market in the DC/Metro region; however, we have thankfully been able to refill our open positions by thinking outside the box to attract new police officers and retain our current police officers. We strongly believe this crisis will continue for the foreseeable future as many of today’s individuals no longer have the desire to enter the policing professions as well as the continued battle for agencies to compete in the very small pool of the best and most qualified applicants.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on SB126. We respectfully urge a favorable vote. If you have any questions or need more information, please feel to contact me at vbrito@rockvillemd.gov or 240-314-8912.