



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**Testimony of Senator Jill P. Carter
In Favor of SB0894 - Baltimore City - Control Over Powers of Police
Commissioner
Before the Judicial Proceedings Committee
On March 5th 2024**

Mr. Chairman, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee:

Senate Bill 0894 repeals the exception made for the Baltimore Police Commissioner when it comes to the extent of legislative oversight in the city of Baltimore. Currently, the Baltimore City Charter states that the Baltimore Police Department (BPD), under the leadership of the police commissioner, is exempt from legislative oversight by the mayor and city council. This bill repeals that exemption from the city charter, giving the council the power to implement much needed reforms within the BPD.

For more than a decade, advocates have been trying to get this line removed from the charter to give the Baltimore City Council (BCC) legislative authority over the BPD. In 2021, the General Assembly passed legislation to reestablish the BPD as a City Agency, provided that Baltimore residents ratify an amendment making it so in the City Charter, which would give the City Council and Mayor's Office authority over the Department.

In November 2022, Baltimore residents overwhelmingly voted in favor of making the BPD a City Agency, with over 82% of 132,000 responses voting for the ballot measure. As of January of last year, the BPD is now considered a city agency, but because of this line in the City Charter, the BCC is still powerless to implement much needed reforms into the BPD.

The passing of the federal consent decree mandated the formation of the Civilian Oversight Task Force (COTF) to make recommendations for police accountability measures and to strengthen police-community relations. In its 2018 report, the COTF urged that the BPD be placed back under city control stating, “The BPD will never be fully accountable to its residents until full control of the department is returned to the city”. Throughout its report, the COTF stressed the importance of the Council having legislative power and recommended that such change happen “with all deliberate speed”.

To give the Council the power to make these changes, this legislative body must make one last change in the City Charter to enable local control, by passing SB0894 to remove the one line in the charter that prohibits the BCC from infringing on the power of the Police Commissioner.

As such, I urge this committee to issue a favorable report on SB0894 and implement the will of the citizens of Baltimore, as clearly expressed in the 2022 ballot measure vote, and restore full legislative authority over the BPD to the BCC.

Respectfully,

Jill P. Carter

