

March 5, 2024
Toby Ditz
Baltimore, 21217

TESTIMONY ON SB894 - POSITION: FAVORABLE
Baltimore City-Control over powers of police commissioner

TO: Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Toby Ditz

My name is Toby Ditz. I have been a proud Baltimorean for over forty years, and a resident of District 40. I am submitting this testimony in support of SB 894.

Since 2017, I have been working on local control as a volunteer with a variety of West Baltimore neighborhood and citywide organizations that advocate on behalf of police and criminal justice reform. I have testified orally at least five times at hearings held by this committee, by your counterpart in the House, and by Baltimore City Council. I have also knocked on doors to educate voters on question H, the local control ballot initiative, in the fall of 2022.

I feel passionately about bringing this long campaign to a successful end, and I am not alone. When I pounded the pavement on behalf of the ballot amendment, I spoke to many Baltimoreans who assumed we already had local control and were astounded to find out that we did not. And most activists were stunned when they then discovered that the overwhelmingly favorable vote for the local control referendum was not enough. On learning last year that we still needed to come back to the state legislature to strike out the now outdated language in Article II, #27 the City Charter, one exasperated volunteer said at a meeting, *“Don’t be polite—tell them [the legislature] we are fed up”* with these delays. Then sadly the legislature got cold feet and the bill stalled in 2023.

But that was yesterday. Today, I am more optimistic that the long battle for local control is almost over. We have surmounted every hurdle imposed on us since 2021. And since last session. City Council, with the support of the Local Control Advisory Board, has now completed the important work of codifying into local city Code key components of MD’s public local laws governing the BPD, and it has drafted the new City Charter ballot amendment that spells out the basic scope and duties of the BPD.

Moreover, the Mayor, the City Council, the Baltimore PD, and advocates are now fully united in strong support of SB894. The state’s attorney general’s opinion has also stated that we need the change in the City Charter’s Article II to eliminate ambiguities in Baltimore City Council's capacity to legislate for the Baltimore.

The important thing now is not to falter. We have done our part. It is now up to each and every one of you to deliver at last on the promise you made in 2021 to Baltimoreans to restore the City's powers over the BPD. And you must do it without further hurdles, contingencies or equivocation. Surely it is long past time to grant us, the residents of the great majority Black City of Baltimore, the same powers of local self-governance that you give other Marylanders.

Please report favorably on SB894.