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Joint Audit and Evaluation Committee

Joint Committee on Federal Relations

## THE SENATE OF MARYLAND ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

### MD Police Training & Standards - Eligibility: "Freedom to Serve" (SB48)

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee: January 24, 2024, 2:30pm

Maryland has a public safety crisis.

Police departments are facing challenges in recruiting new officers. As of November 2023, the Baltimore City Police Department instituted mandatory overtime to fill shifts, and they saw a 79% resignation or retirement rate.<sup>1</sup> The Montgomery County Police Department is short 175 officers as of this month.<sup>2</sup> The Prince George's County Police Department was down by at least 300 officers less than six months ago.<sup>3</sup>

Inadequate recruitment means more crime, longer working hours, and ultimately an untenable environment for officers and their communities. [SB48](#) ("Freedom to Serve") addresses this pressing issue.

The bill allows police departments to hire honorably discharged veterans who are Legal Permanent Residents. These individuals are foreign-born people who:

- Lawfully entered the United States;
- Have obtained a work permit and a Social Security Number;
- Pay taxes; and
- Put their lives on the line for our country.

Maryland is falling behind. 13 politically varied states (CA, CO, HI, IL, LA, ME, ND, OK, TN, UT, VT, WA, and WV) allow honorably discharged Legal Permanent Residents to apply for their police forces.<sup>4</sup> SB48 would improve the diversity of our police departments, increasing the ethnic and linguistic range of our officers, and thereby improving communication with minority communities. According to the recent Census, about 15% of Maryland's population is foreign-born,<sup>5</sup> demonstrating the growing need to have a more representative pool of officers.

"Freedom to Serve" is a reintroduction of [SB126](#), which passed the House in 2023. As suggested by the Maryland Military Coalition, active and honorably discharged veterans of the National Guard and the Reserve Components of the U.S. Armed Forces are included.

The crisis in health care staffing was addressed by similar legislation last year ([SB187](#)) that allowed immigrants to obtain health care licensure.

SB48 creates more opportunity for trained, disciplined, patriotic individuals to join our police forces.

**I urge a favorable report on SB48.**

<sup>1</sup> Abell, Jeff. "Baltimore Police Union Sounds Alarm over Severe Staffing Shortages and Mandatory Overtime." WBFF, November 13, 2023.

<https://foxbaltimore.com/news/city-in-crisis/baltimore-police-union-sounds-alarm-over-severe-staffing-shortages-and-mandatory-overtime>.

<sup>2</sup> Shahzad, Maryam. "Police Department down 175 Officers; County Hiring Firm to Help Recruitment." Montgomery Community Media, January 10, 2024.

<https://www.mymcmedia.org/police-department-down-175-officers-county-hiring-firm-to-help-recruitment/>.

<sup>3</sup> Colton, Emma. "Maryland Police Department Turns to Island Territory as Search for Recruits Turns Desperate." Fox News, September 19, 2023.

<https://www.foxnews.com/us/maryland-police-department-turns-island-territory-search-recruits-turns-desperate>.

<sup>4</sup> "Background: Jurisdictions Permitting LPR Hiring." Law Enforcement Immigration Task Force, August 17, 2021.

<https://leitf.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/LPR-Hiring-Of-Law-Enforcement.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> "Immigrants in Maryland." American Immigration Council, August 6, 2020. <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/immigrants-in-maryland>.