

March 3, 2024

Sarah Lewitus

Ednor Gardens, Baltimore City

TESTIMONY ON SB894

Baltimore City - Control Over Powers of Police Commissioner

TO: Senator Will Smith, Senator Jeff Waldstreicher, and the Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Sarah Lewitus

My name is Sarah Lewitus and I am a resident of District 14. I am submitting this testimony on SB0894 - Baltimore City - Control Over Powers of Police Commissioner.

I am affiliated with the organizing group Jews United for Justice. As a homeowner, an artist, and a new mother, I feel that it is essential that Baltimore City restore control of the Baltimore Police Department to Baltimore residents so that Baltimore residents can have a voice in the management of health and safety resources in our city.

BPD consistently fails in its mission to “provide for the safety and well-being of all,” as made clear by Baltimore city’s seven-year federal consent decree, because of police abuses. The current system is simply not working. It is time to listen to the people of Baltimore City, who voted overwhelmingly in favor of making the BPD a City agency once more (over 82% of Baltimoreans voted for Question H, the local control ballot measure, in the most recent election).

As a resident of Baltimore City, I should be empowered by the city to have a democratic voice in the control of the Department that purports to be concerned with my safety and well-being.

As an artist, I am confident that the people of Baltimore City can be creative, bold, and brave in imagining how safety and well-being is handled in our city, in ways that we are not enabled to do now, without local control.

And as a new mother raising my child in Baltimore City, I am determined that my child should have the opportunity to grow up in a community that has a direct voice in how safety and well-being is carried out.

The federal consent decree mandated the formation of a Civilian Oversight Task Force to make recommendations to strengthen police accountability and police-community relations. In their

2018 report they state: “The BPD will never be fully accountable to its residents until full control of the department is returned to the city.” They stress the importance of the City Council having legislative power and recommend that this change happen “with all deliberate speed.” It is your duty to listen to the Civilian Oversight Task Force and listen to the people of Baltimore City.

We want the City Council, our local, elected legislators, to have legislative authority to make changes to BPD policy.

To fulfill the will of Baltimoreans, the Maryland General Assembly must immediately restore control of the BPD to Baltimore residents through our local legislature. Further delay is unacceptable. Please advocate for SB0894 in the General Assembly.

Thank you for your time.

Respectfully,
Sarah Lewitus