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Heidi Rhodes
Silver Spring, MD 20904



TESTIMONY ON HB0533 - POSITION: FAVORABLE

County Police Accountability Boards – Investigation of Complaints of Police Misconduct

TO: Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Bartlett, and members of the Judiciary Committee

FROM: Heidi Rhodes

My name is Heidi Rhodes. I am a resident of District 14. I am submitting this testimony on behalf of Jews United for Justice in support of HB0533 County Police Accountability Boards – Investigation of Complaints of Police 3 Misconduct. My Jewish faith has clear guidelines that stress the need for full community participation in this oversight process. Rabbi Yitzhak taught that "A ruler is not to be appointed unless the community is first consulted" (Babylonian Talmud Berachot 55a) – his teaching reminds us that this vital oversight needs to be by and for the community that is being policed. Oversight is a critical need in our society especially for those with the power to disrupt and disturb lives. We need an independent civilian police review process that reflects the diversity of the community being policed. Without this, it is contrary to the spirit of the Maryland Police Accountability Act (MPAA) of 2021 which established the Police Accountability Board and will only maintain the status quo.

In addition, I have learned in my over 35 years with the Intelligence Community that those with the extraordinary power to cause damage to our community require civilian oversight. As an example, after the Snowden revelations, a new civilian oversight organization was established, run by those *outside* the Intelligence community, which had the authority to delve into every aspect of our work and to institute new control procedures. These were especially important in times when judgment calls had to be made. While we had our own Inspector General investigations, it was key that someone outside the process was also investigating.

We acknowledge that police need to make many judgment calls as they conduct their work. What I learned through my IC work was that when people have strong oversight they tend to err on the side of caution when making those judgment calls. This caution can mean that unconscious biases and stereotypes are less likely to come into play by those making these calls.

Both my Jewish faith and my long career have taught me that strong oversight mandates the ability to conduct independent investigations. To be true to the spirit of the 2021 MPAA and to make true oversight by the communities being policed a reality in Maryland we need the Police Accountability Board to have independent investigative powers. : **I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on HB0533.**