



DEPARTMENT OF POLICE

Marc Elrich
County Executive

Marcus G. Jones
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Statement of Chief Marcus Jones
Montgomery County Department of Police

In Support of HB 0008
*Maryland Police Training and Standards Commission –
Police Officer Certification – Eligibility (Freedom to Serve Act)*

Judiciary Committee
January 23, 2024

Members of the Judiciary Committee, thank you for considering my testimony regarding this proposed legislation to **update** HB 0433, passed in 2019. I am Chief Marcus Jones with the Montgomery County Department of Police. I am testifying in favor of the HB 0008 bill introduced this year by Delegate Fraser-Hidalgo. HB 0008 serves to expand the Freedom to Serve Act HB 0433 by removing the latter portion of the provision that an honorably discharged Military veteran, who is a non-citizen, can apply to become a Maryland Police Officer **ONLY when they are in the process of becoming a citizen.**

The Maryland Police Training and Standards Commission (MPTSC) determines best practices regarding hiring qualifications. Over the decades, these requirements have evolved, reflecting social and cultural norms. In 2019, the General Assembly saw the wisdom of including honorably discharged non-citizens into the eligibility field for Maryland Law Enforcement. The law has enabled non-citizen residents with honorable military service across the state of Maryland to apply for the position of Police Officer. The additional provision passed in 2019 that the applicant *is in the process they become a citizen* was intended to serve as an extra layer of protection for your constituents but restricted the number of potential applicants.

Law Enforcement Agencies can always adopt stricter hiring standards but need to expand the standards set by the MPTSC. Adding the provision of needing to be in the process of becoming a US Citizen excluded a percentage of non-citizens from applying. HB 0008 seeks to rectify this provision.

In addition to seeking patient candidates to provide quality customer service and listening skills, police agencies also emphasize candidates who mirror the community they will serve.

Recruiting high-quality police candidates has been made more difficult in recent years. There is well-documented data to support that there are fewer individuals in today's workforce and this trend will not change in the coming years. Law enforcement agencies continue to experience challenges in

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recruiting well-qualified individuals willing to serve their community as law enforcement officers. Candidates from our armed forces have proven to adapt to the roles of guardians in our communities serving as police officers and have made tremendous contributions. We should trust those who protect us and trust those in leadership to choose the best candidates to serve in our communities and this provision will boost the servant ranks.

HB 0008 is a clean-up of HB 0433 that was passed in 2019 by further expanding the population in our community who can be considered as candidates to be law enforcement officers – permanent legal residents who have been honorably discharged from the U.S. armed forces. These members have already enlisted in the U.S. Military and served honorably to protect our country. Their spirit and willingness to serve are unquestioned. Regardless of citizenship, every applicant must pass a rigorous background check, perform the physical requirements, communicate effectively, and complete all academic training requirements.

In short, this good legislation will provide additional opportunities for law enforcement agencies to recruit qualified, diverse applicants when law enforcement agencies face a continued decline in applicants.

Thank you for your time.

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