

Hannah Zinker
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TESTIMONY ON SB894 - POSITION: FAVORABLE

Baltimore City - Control Over Powers of Police Commissioner

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

FROM: Hannah Zinker

My name is Hannah Zinker, and I am a resident of District 46 in Baltimore City. On behalf of Jews United for Justice, I am submitting this testimony in support of SB894, Baltimore City—Control Over Powers of Police Commissioner. JUFJ organizes 6,000 Jewish Marylanders and allies from across the state in support of local and state campaigns for social, racial, and economic justice. I have dedicated my professional life to working against injustices in our world— becoming a lawyer and now working for a nonprofit that engages young people in service work and social justice learning. In our democracy, the will of the people and their ability to take action is our greatest strength— and the people of Baltimore City have spoken. In 2022, over 82% of Baltimoreans voted to make the Baltimore Police Department a city agency, as a way to restore power to the people through local control. However, to codify local control, the Maryland General Assembly must remove a minor provision in the Baltimore City Charter that continues to prohibit Baltimore from having control over the Baltimore Police Department.

Baltimore City is the only locality in Maryland with limited control over its own police department, and one of only two in our entire country. Because of this, Baltimore City is unable to meaningfully enforce police accountability or reform measures that would benefit both residents and officers. Other jurisdictions may use their local control of police departments to take safety measures like requiring the use of body-worn cameras or collecting data on use-of-force incidents and arrests. Such steps keep police departments accountable to the people and allow officials to make changes that best suit their communities' needs. Baltimore City residents should have these opportunities but have not for over 150 years. This is a racially unjust and insulting policy, signaling to the majority-Black residents of Baltimore and their officials that they are not trusted to govern themselves.

If Baltimore establishes local control of their police department, community members and officers could build a more just, more effective, and more trustworthy BPD. Until this happens, Baltimoreans have no hope for transparency and accountability in their city's policing.

The people are waiting for their voices to finally be heard. I respectfully urge this committee to make this a reality and return a favorable report on SB894.