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Testimony in Support of SB829

To: Chair, William C. Smith, Vice Chair, Jeff Waldstreicher, and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee

From: Cynthia D Gross

Good afternoon, my name is Cynthia Gross and I am a lifelong resident of Baltimore City. My family and I have lived in the same homes, on the same block for over 40 years and I my residence is currently within the 46th legislative district.

In 2019, the Baltimore City Council unanimously passed the Transparency and Oversight in Claims and Litigation ordinance. This ordinance, from my understanding, prohibits the inclusion, use and/or approval of nondisclosure agreements, by City employees, officials and agencies, including the Board of Estimates, in the settlement of police misconduct/alleged misconduct cases. This ordinance was/is seen by many City residents, including myself, as a step forward in creating a more transparent and accountable City government. The City ordinance, no longer restrains the victim's freedom of speech, and facilitates the healing process. Thanks to the Transparency and Oversight in Claims and Litigation ordinance, victims in police misconduct cases will be able to seek professional help, discuss their pain/trauma and join support groups, without fear of financial retribution and compounded trauma.

It is my assessment, that Senate Bill 829 (SB 829), seeks to maintain a level of accountability, transparency and healing that Baltimore City residents lobbied, fought for and received with the Transparency and Oversight in Claims ordinance enacted by the Baltimore City Council. By extending the prohibition against the use of nondisclosure agreements, in civil claims, to police employed by institutions of higher learning, operating within Baltimore City boundaries, SB 829 builds on the actions of the Baltimore City Council to move the City forward. The citizens and residents of Baltimore City should not have to forgo basic liberties, if they are involved in civil case, involving police misconduct, committed by officers employed by institutions of higher learning. I urge this committee and this legislative body to vote in favor of SB 829. Thanks