

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 1090  
Steven Sellers Lapham, Gaithersburg, Maryland

March 3, 2020

Dear Maryland Legislators,

I write in favor of House Bill 1090, “Law Enforcement—Complaints and Investigations and Use of Force (Anton’s Law).”

Two decades ago, my family lived on Flower Avenue in Silver Spring, and we would take walks through Sligo Creek Park. In 2018, I was horrified to watch the body camera video, online, of a police officer accosting and hounding Robert L. White, an unarmed black man walking through the Sligo Creek neighborhood, as he often did. That confrontation ended in the officer firing his weapon, killing Mr. White. To me, the confrontation looks entirely unnecessary. Why does the mere presence of a police officer with a gun turn a quiet, sunny day into a tragedy?

Early in 2019, I was horrified again when the police and county government announced their finding: There was no wrong doing by the police officer. That officer is back on the force, and the residents of Montgomery County know almost nothing about him.

I’m not proud that it took the death of a neighbor, and the advent of online cell-phone videos showing police brutality, to get me personally involved. I helped organize a one-year anniversary memorial service for Mr. White at the Christ Congregational Church in Silver Spring. I ask my African American neighbors what they are experiencing from the police. I read books: *Chokehold*, and *The End of Policing*. I attend Silver Spring Justice Coalition meetings and public forums and council hearings.

I hope we all realize that the cell phone videos we see are a small sampling of all the abuse that is occurring. These incidents are symptoms of the disease of mass incarceration, with its roots in slavery, that still cripples our society every hour of every day. This is not just a problem of policing. Compassionate and patriotic Americans will have to fight creatively on many fronts – in education, law enforcement, housing, employment, and healthcare, to name a few. To grow a new ethos of mutual accountability, restorative justice, and human rights, we will need new laws. Anton’s law is one.

This bill is named for nineteen-year-old Anton Black, an African American, who died at the hands of police in Greensboro, Maryland, in 2018. His family has been told almost nothing about what happened on that day. If state-sponsored violence is to be checked, if police are accountable for their actions, then civilians must have full access to the records of any incident, and full information about the officers involved. If you file a complaint against a police officer in Maryland, you should have the right to know how the investigation was conducted. If other complaints have been filed against that officer, you should get to see those, too. Nothing could be more important for the well-being of our society than that basic affirmation of our right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Sincerely,

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