

State of Maryland

Commission on Civil Rights

"Our vision is to have a State that is free from any trace of unlawful discrimination."



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January 21, 2021

Senate Bill 237 – Public Safety – Law Enforcement Reform POSITION: Support

Dear Chairperson Smith, Vice Chairperson Waldstreicher, and Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee:

The Maryland Commission on Civil Rights ("MCCR"; "The Commission") is the State agency responsible for the enforcement of laws prohibiting discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodations, and state contracts based upon race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, marital status, familial status, sexual orientation, gender identity, genetic information, physical and mental disability, and source of income.

Senate Bill 237 seeks to codify a number of widely considered common-sense police reforms. Some of these reforms include, but are not limited to, entry-level and annual in-service training on anti-discrimination, implicit bias, and force de-escalation; adoption and use of body cameras; protocols to identify and intervene with law enforcement officers who are at risk of using excessive force; requirements on law enforcement officers to intervene in and report incidents where other officers engage in the use of excessive force; and prohibitions on the use of neck holds and other techniques that restrict blood and/or air flow, except in self-defense against death or serious injury.

A spotlight was shown on the need for meaningful police reform in Maryland with the unfortunate and unnecessary death of Freddie Gray in police custody in April, 2015. Despite a number of measures being adopted since then, including the attempted implementation of uniform standards across all law enforcement agencies and increased accountability, so much more work remains to be done if we are to restore the community's faith in the law enforcement officers sworn to protect them. Senate Bill 237 takes some initial important steps toward meaningful reform. The Maryland Commission on Civil Rights hopes that SB237 will be thoughtfully considered as the General Assembly addressing meaningful and effective law enforcement reform legislative during the 2021 Legislative Session.

For these reasons, the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights urges a favorable report on SB237. Thank you for your time and consideration of the information contained in this letter. The Maryland Commission on Civil Rights looks forward to the continued opportunity to work with you to improve and promote civil rights in Maryland.