

January 19, 2021

Testimony in Support of SB0166 - Criminal Procedure - Police Officers - Duty to Report Misconduct (Maryland Police Accountability Act)

Honorable Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee:

I submit this testimony in support of SB0166 as a victim of assault and harassment by Baltimore City Police members. From 1998 until 2018 I was an engaged Baltimore City resident, community leader, youth group leader, and active supporter of the police department. While there were occasional issues with poor performance in the department that impacted our community, there were no major issues. In 2018 a Baltimore officer identified me as someone who provided information about misconduct issues. The subsequent harassment and intimidation efforts by BPD members and their collaborators resulted in my family relocating to a safer environment.

In 2020, through the efforts of fellow residents and community leaders, private investigators, and law enforcement from jurisdictions outside Baltimore City, I was able to participate in mediation with some of the officers involved. While I am unable to share all the information learned in mediation due to confidentiality agreements, I can share the following in support of SB0166:

1. Multiple Baltimore City Police officers and supervisors were aware of intimidation and harassment activity committed over the course of two years by four Baltimore City officers and their collaborators against nine residents. The officers aware of the activity DID NOT report the activity to supervisors because
  - a. The officer believed reporting misconduct would have no positive impact “nothing will be done” and “this city is a [expletive] anyway, it doesn’t matter”,
  - b. The officer was concerned the Fraternal Order of Police would retaliate against the reporting officer “the union will have my [expletive]”,
  - c. The officer knew a higher-ranking BPD member was involved and was concerned for his own job “[name redacted] would have me fired”,
  - d. The officer was concerned for his own safety “I would wind up in Shock Trauma like you”,
  - e. The officer believed there was no valid method to report misconduct he witnessed “who do I tell? IAD won’t do anything but tell [name redacted] I reported him”,
  - f. The officer felt no legal or ethical obligation to report “why?”.
2. Two Baltimore City Police officers resigned after witnessing misconduct, indicating they felt there was no way to report misconduct but also no way to continue working with the department and remain ethical.
3. The number of officers aware of at least one instance of reportable misconduct is high compared to total staff.

There is currently no incentive for officers to report misconduct, the implementation of the Ethical Policing is Courageous program in Baltimore City is slow and ineffective. Officers who witness misconduct have no reason to report it, and are often incentivized to aid in covering up incidents. This has led to a department with rapidly decreasing integrity as officers who routinely violate policy are not reprimanded or removed from service, dishonest officers continue to influence new recruits, and officers with strong ethics are not able to stomach working with such a department and leave for jurisdictions with higher standards.

I strongly encourage you to support SB0166 to provide officers incentive to report misconduct, and begin the steps towards increased accountability in police departments.

Respectfully submitted,

Natasza Bock-Singleton,

President and Founder, Bloom and Grow