

Subject: Senate Bill SB0276

Date: January 19, 2021

I, Naveeda Khan, residing in 213 Chancery Road, Baltimore, MD, write in strong support of the Senate Bill SB0276 to repeal the JHU Private Police Department. I do so in my capacity as a tenured professor of Johns Hopkins University.

Why as a professor of JHU do I so strongly oppose the creation of a private police force by Hopkins and by any other institution of higher learning? As a social scientist, I do not believe that we have sufficient evidence to support the claim that having a private police force will reduce violence or better protect individuals and communities. In fact, the data predominantly points to the fact that having police in certain areas, displaces criminal activity onto adjoining areas, which are forced to deal with the situation by hiring armed security of their own, and, if unable to do so, suffering a worsening in their situation. In other words, private police passes on the burden of violence onto poorer and more vulnerable neighborhoods, accentuating inequality and ghettoization.

Having a private police force is an outright admission of a lack of confidence in local government. Instead of pursuing proper means to strengthen local government and produce accountability, the act of creating a private police force is in effect an illegitimate capture of the legitimate authority of representative government. Local government may collude with the private institution in enabling this capture, but such collusion doesn't take away from the fact that the security of its constituency is the responsibility of elected officials.

The private entity that is empowered to carry arms may be technically trained but is not trained in the code of public service. It must of necessity serve its employers. This makes private policing exclusionary, prioritizing the protection of private property over the safety of individuals, potentially vulnerable to violating civil and human rights, and unaccountable to a broader public.

Next, I want to explain why I do not trust the Johns Hopkins University administration to run a private police force. Hopkins has repeatedly shown itself to be a non-transparent corporate-like entity with top down management whose claims to be otherwise is not born out by any actions that I have observed in the last three-four years that I have been attending to the issue of the private police bill. The university administration has never provided a persuasive argument as to why it is pursuing this course. Among the many excuses proffered are that a police force will mitigate the concerns of potential student applicants and their parents who currently view Baltimore as dangerous, and that having a police force will allow Hopkins to join the ranks of its peer institutions. Running a private police force, which will undoubtedly be a huge financial undertaking, to offset perceptions rather than deal with realities on the ground would make this action an expensive mode of perception management. Also to think that Hopkins, which considers itself one of the leading institutions in international public health, would reduce the issue of violence to one of private policing rather than deal with it as a public health concern suggests that the current administration of Hopkins would rather that Hopkins be imitative and indistinguishable from its peers, than be a leader among them.

Hopkins made a big show of consulting community leadership, minority faculty and staff, and students in its various committees and forums on the issue but, as these very participants readily attest, every objection to the private police bill was put aside. Simply organizing town halls for airing concerns, while not taking seriously any of them, some of which were petitions signed by scores and even hundreds of people, does not constitute meaningful consultation. They are just pro forma at best, media spectacles at worst. If the later, they suggest the cynicism that informed this consultative effort.

When undergraduate and graduate students organized the Garland Hall protest, I sat in many times to listen to the students, converse with them, etc. but I did not see any member of upper administration attempt to do so. Rather the administration had security officers escort them in and out of the building, indicating not just fear but a possible demonization of the students. I also watched with horror when no fewer than 80 police officials in riot gear, barricades and trucks showed up to force the ten or so students within Garland Hall to evacuate the building. There was no effort to learn how many students were within the building and

to match force appropriately, once again indicating that the university administration is more given to media spectacles, including the demonization of its own students, than to appropriate behavior befitting of serious, accountable governance.

Although the administration did not press any legal charges against the students involved in the protest, they undertook a closed-door review and reprimand of several of them. I have only been privy to a few student accounts of these sessions with administrative figures, but it is clear from them that there was no explanation given to students as to why these staff members were chosen to correct student behavior, what authority they had over the students, what procedures they were using to carry out these sessions, and why they undertook to threaten students with expulsion if they involved themselves in any future agitation. Such opaque modes of disciplining, whose impact is to muzzle student protest, leave me with no confidence in Hopkins administration.

Finally, in 2021, by which it has become amply clear that policing in this country, public and private, is in need of serious rethinking and reform, for Hopkins to be pursuing a private police force seems completely out of sync with the needs of the times. Therefore, I write to strongly urge everyone to support SB0276 to repeal the JHU Private Police Department. If you have any questions or concerns, please get in touch with me at nkhan5@jhu.edu or naveedariver@gmail.com or 410/274-0191.

Thank you for your kind attention. Yours sincerely,

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