

Dear Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee,

This testimony is being submitted by residents of District 46 who are also community leaders in Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore. SURJ is a group of community members supporting local groups working for greater racial justice in Baltimore and the State of Maryland. We are also working in collaboration with the Campaign for Justice, Safety, and Jobs. We are **testifying in support of Senate Bill 786 if it is amended.**



Senate Bill 786 would return control of the Baltimore City Police Department to Baltimore City, ensuring local elected officials can directly govern its operations. The Department has been a state agency since 1860, when the State of Maryland took control because the city government, then under the control of the nativist Know-Nothing Party, was not controlling rampant, election-related violence instigated by Know-Nothing partisans. The ability to appoint the head of the force was only returned to the Mayor of Baltimore in 1976, and other than some changes to the Mayor's authority to fire the Commissioner, there has been no further movement to permit Baltimore City control over its own police force.

In the present state of affairs, the only way the city can influence or exert control over BCPD is by setting its budget or by firing a Police Commissioner and hiring a new one. These are very blunt instruments that give the Mayor and City Council little practical ability to govern how policing is handled in Baltimore. The citizens of Baltimore fund a police department that they have no ability to exert influence over. To fight for local change, they must travel to Annapolis to negotiate with legislators from other districts, most of whom have no experience or personal investment in the challenges Baltimore citizens face.

The fact that Baltimore City, which is over 60% Black, does not have control of its own police department is a significant mechanism of racial oppression. At a time when we have seen tremendous growth in the movement of Black people who are seeking greater community control over policing, the residents of Baltimore do not have the power to enact the changes they want to see. Year after year, we have seen Baltimore residents take off of work, arrange transportation and childcare, and wait all day in the hallways in order to testify. This is an unreasonably high bar to make one's voice heard. All too often, Baltimore residents are not heard and their interests are lost in the hectic pace of the state legislative session. We need to be able to legislate at the local level where there is more direct representation and more time to properly examine the issues.

Because of the importance of this bill and what it would mean for local input into how policing works, it is all the most important that this bill is implemented as soon as possible. Given 2022 is the earliest date a ballot initiative could happen, this means the 2025 date can and should be moved forward to January 1, 2023. Additionally, the spirit of this bill is to give greater community input into policing, so the implementation of this bill should also be done in that spirit. Unfortunately, as written the Advisory Board does not explicitly include community members. Consequently, Senate Bill 786 must be amended to include community members on the Advisory Board.

It is for these reasons that we are encouraging you to vote **in support of Senate Bill 786 with amendments to the bill to ensure it is implemented by 2023 and includes several community members in the Advisory Board.**

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,

SURJ District 46 Community Leaders

Sarah Goldman

Christina Pham Linhoff

Ben Goldberg

Liz Simon-Higgs

Brian Seel

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