



February 4, 2021

Honorable Senator William C. Smith, Jr.
Chair, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 East
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Testimony in SUPPORT of SB627 – Law Enforcement Officers' Bill of Rights - Repeal and Procedures for Discipline

Dear Chair William C. Smith, Jr. and Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee Members:

On behalf of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, I thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 627 entitled Law Enforcement Officers' Bill of Rights - Repeal and Procedures for Discipline. CAIR is America's largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization.

In the early 1970's, Maryland became the first state in the country to draft a blueprint for and enact a Law Enforcement Officers' Bill of Rights. After lobbying from police unions and associations, fifteen other states have followed suit and passed their own version. However, Maryland's LEOBR remains arguably the most expansive and extreme of such laws in the nation.

While the majority of police officers maintain integrity in performing their responsibilities, those who do not are still able to escape accountability because of the protections LEOBR affords. It favors police officers over communities they are sworn to protect and serve, and prohibits civilian oversight groups from holding accountable officers who exhibit inappropriate conduct.

The Maryland LEOBR provides police officers special safeguards when complaints against them are investigated, including strict time limits on allegations and the expungement of disciplinary records. It imposes significant impediments to conducting transparent and diligent investigations, and places broad limitations on disciplinary action.

At a time when our state and country are grappling with how to restore trust that law enforcement officers will treat communities they serve fairly and ethically, it is more important than ever to pass this bill to repeal this measure. Police officers' honesty and integrity is vital not only to their job functions, but also in the upholding of the law. More than any other profession, they should not be allowed to act with such secrecy and expansive impunity.

Repealing LEOBR will bring our state one step closer to comprehensive police reform that is desperately needed to restore faith within the criminal justice systems. It will simplify the process to seek accountability for harmful police misconduct, restore badly eroded community trust in law enforcement, and ensure that good officers are not wrongly maligned.

CAIR supports this legislation and respectfully urges a favorable report. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Zainab Chaudry, Pharm.D.
Director, CAIR Office in Maryland
Council on American-Islamic Relations
Email: zchaudry@cair.com
Phone: 410-971-6062