

Testimony Concerning SB0276
“Johns Hopkins University - Police Department - Repeal”
Submitted to the Senate Judiciary Proceedings
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Position: Support

My name is Rachel Viquiera, I am an alumnus of Johns Hopkins University, both at the undergraduate and Master’s level, and I currently live and work in Baltimore as an epidemiologist at the Maryland State Health Department. I have lived in the 46th district of Baltimore City for nearly 3 years. I speak on my own behalf today from the perspective of a public health professional and a citizen deeply concerned for the safety of my community as a result of this bill.

During my six-year tenure at JHU, I regularly witnessed the University demonize the communities surrounding the campuses. The university increasingly published misleading crime alerts and presented misleading statistics at orientations and meetings to justify heavy security presence. Actions like this distanced JHU affiliates from the Greater Baltimore Community, and continued a legacy of Hopkins’ abuse of the communities around its campuses.

I witnessed the administration instill this fear while simultaneously neglecting actual threats to community safety - suppressing reports of sexual assault, failing to provide mental health support, refusing to divest from fossil fuels, preventing employees from unionizing under terrible working conditions, remaining in partnership with US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and calling dozens of police to arrest just 7 protestors rather than have a single, open conversation. I am not alone when I say that Johns Hopkins University is practiced in instilling fear of Baltimore within its walls. The University has historically used that fear to excuse its neglect of the communities within and surrounding its many campuses and it uses that fear today to continue its exploitation of those communities, unimpeded.

It is shameful the “The Community Safety and Strengthening Act” was ever passed, and Maryland now has an opportunity to right this wrong by repealing the legislation that enabled JHU’s private police force. We must not allow a private, unaccountable, institution to implement a police force. We cannot say that endangering the lives of our neighbors, without their consent, is an acceptable price to pay in exchange for the *appearance* of safety. None of this is strengthening communities.

With that, I would like to reiterate the points my colleagues and neighbors have made:

“1. The area that private police will be deployed, the Middle East neighborhood, is already heavily policed, and Hopkins security is already a huge presence.

2. Over 6,152 community members stated our opposition to the police force in [this petition](#) which has still not been acknowledged by Hopkins administration. How can we expect the accountability of any future JHUPD if its administration will not even take accountability to deeply listen to, or acknowledge, community members who oppose the formation of the force? Johns Hopkins's actions, which have excluded dissenting voices, including the voices of those who would be most affected by JHUPD, do not bode well for an accountable police force.

3. Over the years, JHU has made many promises to the Middle East area around the medical campus, including the Minority Inclusion Agreement, which in 2002 promised 8,000 new jobs and a community reinvestment fund in East Baltimore. As of 2019, JHU has created about 1,500 new jobs—20% of what they promised. Instead, Hopkins broke their promises while still forcibly removing over 700 families from their homes.
4. In the death of Tyrone West, whose life was taken seven years ago by a Morgan State officer, we see the harm that University policing promises—in this case it was a Morgan State officer.
5. Research and history show that reform is ineffectual. We've had six years of reform efforts implemented in the wake of the 2014 killings of Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Laquan McDonald, Tamir Rice, and way too many others. Yet, all of that reform didn't save Freddie Gray, or Alton Sterling, or Korryn Gaines, or Walter Scott, or Breonna Taylor, or George Floyd. Reform was not worth those lost lives and it certainly is not worth another.
6. We want the University to place the funds that were intended for JHPD, and more, in the hands of communities, such as residents of the Middle East near the medical campus. Instead of embarking on new projects like JHUPD, JHU should implement what they have already committed to and neglected to see through in the past: the Minority Inclusion Agreement, which in 2002 promised 8,000 new jobs and a community reinvestment fund in East Baltimore. This is what the safety Johns Hopkins claims to desire looks like.”

Community safety is a continuous, comprehensive process in partnership with the community. Real community safety develops self-determination, cultivates health, and reconciles the historical, harmful policies of the institution. Please support SB0276 to repeal JHU's private police force.