

January 19, 2021

TO: Senator William C. Smith and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee
FROM: The Anti-Racist Coalition at Johns Hopkins School of Public Health
RE: SB0276, Repealing the Johns Hopkins Private Police Force

The Anti-Racist Coalition (ARC) at Johns Hopkins School of Public Health strongly supports SB0276 because the existence of more police in Baltimore is harmful to the surrounding community and to Johns Hopkins itself.

ARC was formed by women of color in the wake of nationwide protests and uprisings against police violence and killings during the summer of 2020. The group is committed to the actual implementation of anti-racist practices rather than a theoretical understanding of racism. We find this to be particularly resonant at Johns Hopkins University, an institution that prides itself on its academic reputation despite its perverse history with the greater Baltimore community. We cannot stand idle as our school continues to harm our city.

Police violence is a public health crisis and has been identified as such by the American Public Health Association, the American Medical Association, and the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health.^{1, 2, 3} There are numerous studies that capture the effects of policing and its disproportionate impact on people who are Black, Latine, Indigenous, and people with disabilities or mental illnesses. We know that just 5% of all arrests in the U.S. are for serious violent offenses; we know that one in a thousand Black men are expected to be killed by the police; we know that interactions with the police is linked to trauma, anxiety, and suicide in young people.^{4, 5, 6} But more importantly, we know the stories of people directly impacted by police violence and we know that more police will never be the answer to a safer Baltimore.

The creation of a Johns Hopkins police force is not supported by the community. Over 6,000 students, faculty, staff, and community members signed a petition to oppose the police force, including the NAACP and ACLU of Maryland.⁷ The Middle East neighborhood, which has been previously harmed by displacement from Johns Hopkins' East Baltimore Development Initiative and broken promises from the Minority Inclusion Agreement, is already heavily policed by Baltimore Police existing Johns Hopkins' security. Adding even more police would contribute to the ongoing harm faced by residents, faculty, and students.

Reform is not a feasible option. In the years after Freddie Gray's death, Baltimore City attempted to reform its police force. None of reforms took hold; there are more homicides and significantly more spending due to police overtime in comparison to 2014.⁸ Campus police are no exception. The Johns Hopkins' proposed accountability board was disbanded merely two months after it was announced. University-affiliated police officers in Baltimore were implicated in the murder of Tyrone West. Police systems and policing are built upon the foundations of anti-Blackness, white supremacy, and the legacy of slavery; there is no such thing as a non-violent police force and there is no way to reform a system intended and designed to kill Black lives.⁹

Just as ARC was formed in the light of a national reckoning, Johns Hopkins called for a two-year pause on the development of its private police force in hopes for a more palatable time to police Baltimore. We call on you to put an end to it altogether and vote for SB0276.

¹ Addressing Law Enforcement Violence as a Public Health Issue. American Public Health Association. 13 November 2018. <https://www.apha.org/policies-and-advocacy/public-health-policy-statements/policy-database/2019/01/29/law-enforcement-violence>

² Ehrenfeld, JM, Harris, PA. Police brutality must stop. American Medical Association. 29 May 2020. <https://www.ama-assn.org/about/leadership/police-brutality-must-stop>

³ MacKenzie, EJ, Cooper, LA. Racism: A Public Health Crisis. Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. 31 May 2020. <https://www.jhsph.edu/about/dean-mackenzie/viewpoint/racism-a-public-health-crisis.html>

⁴ Sawyer, W. Ten key facts about policing: Highlights from our work. Prison Policy Initiative. 5 June 2020. <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2020/06/05/policingfacts/>

⁵ Edwards F, Lee H, Esposito M. Risk of being killed by police use of force in the United States by age, race–ethnicity, and sex. PNAS. 2019;116(34):16793-16798. doi:10.1073/pnas.1821204116

⁶ DeVlyder JE, Jun H-J, Fedina L, et al. Association of Exposure to Police Violence With Prevalence of Mental Health Symptoms Among Urban Residents in the United States. JAMA Netw Open. 2018;1(7):e184945. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2018.4945

⁷ No JHU Private Police Petition Signatories. 29 June 2020.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/13twmkewdH7IFe1Xd7Z1pwy7hCRxSKSYJ/view>

⁸ Woods, B, Soderberg, B. Police ‘reform’ doesn’t work. Baltimore proves it. The Eagle. 18 June 2020.

https://theeagle.com/opinion/columnists/police-reform-doesnt-work-baltimore-proves-it/article_ea969f0d-9bd2-5728-b166-9a0f6f4adf99.html

⁹ Kaba, M. Yes, We Mean Literally Abolish the Police. The New York Times. 12 June 2020.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/12/opinion/sunday/floyd-abolish-defund-police.html>