

February 4, 2021

Tali Goelman
Bethesda, MD 20815

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB627

Law Enforcement Officers' Bill of Rights - Repeal and Procedures for Discipline

TO: Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Tali Goelman

My name is Tali Goelman, and I am a sophomore living in Bethesda, in District 16. I am a member of Bonimot Tzedek, a Jewish youth activist organization that has been advocating for racial equity. The organization represents the views of approximately thirty individuals and I urge this committee to support SB627, Law Enforcement Officers' Bill of Rights - Repeal and Procedures for Discipline.

I believe that LEOBR should be repealed because it gives police officers unnecessary and unjust protections, especially when they have enough privilege and power to cause harm to BIPOC communities. The Jewish value of tzedek has influenced my perspective on this issue. Tzedek translates to “justice” in Hebrew, and LEOBR is law with unjust consequences. Individuals must be held accountable for their actions, regardless of their job title, and police officers should most certainly not be exempt from accountability and transparency.. It is evident that Maryland's police departments are in dire need of reform, and repealing LEOBR would be a great and just place to begin this much-needed process. Police should have the same due process rights as every other public employee.

As a white person, I have never directly encountered a dangerous situation with a police officer. However, I have witnessed the implicit biases within police departments firsthand. Over the summer, I enrolled in a Driver’s Ed class, which I soon found out was to be taught by police officers. Most of the time, nothing problematic occurred, and I was simply taught the curriculum. However, one officer proved to be an exception. As he (an older white male officer) spoke to us, he mentioned that he drove in certain Washington D.C. neighborhoods with his windows up so as to “not be shot.” Then, he mentioned that we would probably be practicing driving in Bethesda neighborhoods, so we would be “safe.” For some context, Bethesda neighborhoods are wealthier socioeconomically compared to D.C., and they are predominantly white. Through this commentary, it was clear that the police officer had not-so-subtle racist views stemming from implicit biases. I believe this is a problem within police

departments, and implicit biases combined with power give police opportunities to act in violent ways. Therefore, we must monitor the power that police officers have by repealing LEOBR as soon as possible. LEOBR is harmful towards people of color and BIPOC communities, and it is imperative that government officials ensure a full repeal.

LEOBR gives special protections to police officers, which essentially disregards the principle of equal treatment under the law. Police officers are humans too, just like all of us. They should be held accountable for their actions just like the rest of us are. Repealing LEOBR would simply ease the process of holding officers accountable, and hence it could make Maryland police departments more just in their policing. I respectfully urge this committee for a favorable report on SB627.

Thank you for your time.