



February 4, 2021

The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr.
Chairman, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East, Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Senate Bill 627 - Law Enforcement Officers' Bill of Rights - Repeal and Procedures for Discipline - FAVORABLE

Dear Chairman Smith and Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee members,

Baltimore Harm Reduction Coalition (BHRC) is an advocacy organization that mobilizes community members for the health, dignity, and safety of people targeted by the war on drugs and anti-sex worker policies. As a certified Overdose Response Program, Naloxone distributor, and syringe service program, we have provided essential health care services across the state for years. **BHRC supports Senate Bill 627 (Law Enforcement Officers' Bill of Rights - Repeal and Procedures for Discipline) because this bill will increase community health and well-being.**

Maryland's Law Enforcement Officers Bill of Rights (LEOBoR) was enacted in 1974, adding to then-President Nixon's "War on Drugs" which continues to devastate communities of color. LEOBoR is part of a dynamic series of early 1970s oppressive drug policies that empowered law enforcement to target, harass, and violate communities of color unchecked. During this time, the United States passed the Comprehensive Drug Abuse Prevention and Control Act allowing law enforcement to make "no-knock" raids on private residences. The Act gave precedence to legally protecting Louisville Metro police officers after they raided the home of Breonna Taylor last summer on the false claims that she possessed drugs in her residence, and further protected the officers who murdered Ms. Taylor on site. Drug war policies have resulted in special protections for hyper-militarized law enforcement; violence and mass incarceration against Black communities; and marked increases in overdose fatalities that continue to rise through today.¹

BHRC is dedicated to ending drug war policies, including unchecked law enforcement authority, if for any reason as a means of ending overdose. The Law Enforcement Bill of Rights protects officers without community oversight, maintaining an environment of fear that results in people isolating themselves from loved ones, use drugs alone, and not reach out to emergency services. For years, BHRC has provided educational workshops to hundreds of Marylanders about overdose prevention, drug policies, and racial justice advocacy. In these workshops, participants -- harm reduction service providers, peer outreach workers, and other community members -- have shared countless stories about experiences of harassment, misconduct, and lack of accountability from police in the midst of an overdose epidemic that is killing our loved ones. To advance the impact of life-saving harm reduction strategies that are proven to increase community health and

¹ Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

safety, Maryland must repeal all drug war policies including the Law Enforcement Officers Bill of Rights.

As we navigate multiple intersecting public health crises and after decades of unchecked police interactions, **Marylanders deserve this one step towards systemic community healing. BHRC supports SB627 and broader efforts to gain community reparation. We ask that the Judicial Proceedings Committee give SB627 a favorable report.**

For more information about Baltimore Harm Reduction Coalition or our position, please contact our Director of Mobilization, Rajani Gudlavalleti at rajani@baltimoreharmreduction.org