

**TESTIMONY in Support with Amendments for Senate Bill 786
Baltimore City – Control of the Police Department of Baltimore City**

TO: Chair Smith, Vice Chair Walstreicher, and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee
FROM: Iman Freeman on behalf of Baltimore Action Legal Team

My name is Iman Freeman and I am the Executive Director of Baltimore Action Legal Team (BALT). I submit this testimony in favor of SB 786 with amendments.

In 1860, Baltimore City lost control of its police department as a direct result of racist campaigning and violence on the streets of Baltimore. Prior to that, in the 1850's, Baltimore was unfortunately in the grips of anti-immigration, pro-hate political party that allowed members to freely restrict fellow citizen's access to voting and liberty. At that time, the Baltimore Police Department was a function of the Know Nothing party and allowed violence against political enemies to go unchecked. Unsurprisingly, the Governor eventually stepped in, but in the ugly tradition of Maryland's Governor being unwilling to work with Baltimore's Mayor, the outcome was a bill in the legislature that removed control of the police department from Baltimore's government. With no plan to return control to the democratically elected government of the City, the City has had limited authority within its own community for over 160 years. The control that the state has exerted over Baltimore through the different styles of intervention in the Baltimore Police Department has changed over the years. In 1914-1915, Mayor Preston and Governor Goldsborough had a rather public argument about how effective the state run police were at dealing with issues of vice within the city. Not until 1976 would Baltimore's mayor be able to hire their own police commissioner.

In the past several years there has been increasing awareness and support from City residents to fully return all aspects of the Baltimore Police Department to the City of Baltimore. The motivation for many residents is that, once again, we are dealing with issues of racism in our police force. The systemic racism that exists in every aspect of the justice system - from laws that police enforce to the ways that the police operate in our communities to the cases that State's Attorney's choose to prosecute to the sentences imposed by judges - all harm Baltimore and the people who live in this powerful and resilient city. Baltimore lost power over its police department over issues of racism, and now the residents ask for the return to full control over the department because of racism.

BALT stands with other members of the Coalition for Justice, Safety, and Jobs (CJSJ) in supporting Mayor Scott's bill, with the inclusion of several amendments. We would like to see a shorter implementation of the proposed advisory board to 2023, as well as ensuring that the advisory board includes a dedicated team of civilians. Without these amendments, without specifically ensuring the inclusion of community members who have been demanding return of local control for the past five and ten years, this bill has little merit.

I urge a favorable report, with amendments, on SB 786 from this committee.