

January 19, 2021

Dear Members of the Maryland Senate,

My name is Sarah Zanolini, and I'm a PhD student at Johns Hopkins University writing to strongly voice my support of SB0276, a bill introduced by Senator Jill Carter to repeal the institution of a private police force by Johns Hopkins University.

In the past year we've collectively witnessed a long-overdue national reckoning around policing in this country. We've seen videos of Black and Brown Americans enduring what can only be appropriately described as modern-day lynching at the hands of police. Such murders of innocent Americans by police are not new. They have been woven into the fabric of policing in this country since the reconstruction era, when southerners discontented with the loss of their human property were allowed to construct "separate but equal" laws to reinstitute themselves at the top of the white supremacy pyramid, using the language of "law abiding" and "law breaking" to encode racism without the overt racism of the past. Because we think of justice as blind, and law color-neutral, it is easy to forget that today in 2021, police officers are just as subject to conscious and unconscious racial biases as they were in 1921, and no amount of the "diversity training" tactics we've seen rolled out in recent years has lessened the actual threat posed by police to innocent bystanders – particularly when their skin is black or brown. If you have not recently, please look at the statistics gathered by the site Mapping Police Violence (<https://mappingpoliceviolence.org/>) to see my point.

In case you're still reading, I want to share one further thing with you to demonstrate the degree to which I am serious about this bill of repeal being passed. I am white (or more accurately, a white-passing person of mixed heritage). I am a transplant to Baltimore living next to Hopkins Homewood campus, and my departmental office is on the medical campus, meaning that on the surface, I am very much part of the demographic Hopkins thinks needs a private police force to feel "safe." Yet the idea of private police roaming around Hopkins makes me feel the opposite of safe. My father was white, and I never got to know him because when I was 4 years old he was murdered by police. Legally speaking, everything about his death was justified – he'd (unsuccessfully) robbed a store, he fled to avoid arrest, he might have had gun. When they finally caught him in a dead-end street police shot him: not once, not even one round, but 37 times, after which he was still deemed such a threat that they handcuffed his dead body to the steering wheel of his car. Every day since August 6, 1987, everyone in his family has not only had to carry the ache of his absence and our heartbreaking knowledge of the disjuncture between legal justice and moral justice, but also PTSD in our own interactions with police. It has taken me over 30 years of therapy and life-experience and intellectual knowledge that my white complexion and gender coding make me an unlikely accidental target, yet still I visibly shake in the presence of a police officer, my palms sweat, my body forces me to remember because I am in the presence of someone who can decide whether I live or die, even if I hold enough social privilege for some degree of accountability to maybe take place if I were to be killed. Who wants to remember of the most painful and painfully enduring facts of their family history while

walking to class? I've never felt unsafe in East Baltimore like I've felt unsafe in any space with a cop, ever, because the presence of that holstered gun is to me as indicative of its eventual use as one over the mantel in a Chekov play. I know this sounds hyperbolic, but for my entire adult life I've sought out these stories of other victims, tallied in my mind how frequently police "thought there was a gun" or "thought they were violent" and "thought force was justified." If our court system were known for wrongfully convicting the innocent so often, we would reform it. Yet at least one wrongful -mortal- sentence is passed against someone in this country nearly every day, and we do nothing.

If Hopkins wants to build safety in the Baltimore community, they have all of the tools to do so. Our Public Health and Education programs contain overwhelming numbers of faculty and students invested in this wonderful city, and the funds they have allocated for this force could be reinvested into community programs: after-school enrichment, hiring community mentors who know the struggles at-risk youth face because they were at-risk themselves, drug counseling and rehabilitation programs, job training for the unemployed, more scholarships for high school students, actually paying a fair share of taxes to support Baltimore City's own efforts to make these changes – I could go on and on with this list, but you get my point. It's hard not to see Hopkins continual support for private policing (something as unpopular with their own staff and students as it is with the city community at large) as another way white supremacy encodes Blackness as deviance, and its place in the community as protective as whiteness and white supremacy.

The answer is never more police – let alone police accountable to a corporate master, rather than the community they work within. If you arm them, they will shoot. Sometimes they will be justified, sometimes not. Is this the society we want to build? Is this the Baltimore we want to live in? Failing to pass SB0276 when you have this chance is to be complicit in someone's death and the devastation of their family. Maybe not immediately, but based on the odds, unquestionably someday.

Please, vote in support of Senator Carter's legislation to repeal the institution of a private police force by Johns Hopkins University.

Sincerely,

Sarah Zanolini
PhD Student, Johns Hopkins History of Medicine