

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB0276

To: Senator William C. Smith and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee
From: Students at the Johns Hopkins Schools of Medicine, Nursing, and Public Health
Date: January 19, 2021

We write to you in enthusiastic support for SB0276, a bill that would repeal provisions relating to the establishment and maintenance of a Johns Hopkins Police Department (JHPD). Adding more cops to [one of the most heavily policed cities](#) in the U.S. is a dangerous idea that we call on you to put to an end.

As future healthcare professionals and researchers, it is clear to us that allowing Johns Hopkins to create a private police force will make Baltimore City less safe, especially for those who are Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and/or Disabled. Police violence across the U.S. is a public health crisis, with studies showing that police kill 3 people every day, and 1 in 1000 Black males are expected to be killed by police.^{1,2} The negative health effects of policing are not limited to physical violence. A study conducted in Baltimore and New York found that contact with police—especially if it involves violence—is tied to trauma, anxiety, and suicide attempts/ideation among young people.³

Private police forces are not exempt from perpetuating this violence. At [Yale](#); the [University of California, Los Angeles](#); the [University of Chicago](#); and [Arizona State University](#), among others, Black students, faculty, and community members have been harassed, tasered, shot, and assaulted by campus cops. In Maryland, we haven't forgotten that it was a Morgan State Police Officer who murdered Tyrone West in 2013. Must we wait for Johns Hopkins Police Officers to do the same before reconsidering whether this police force was a good idea?

The law authorizing the private police was unpopular among Hopkins students and faculty when it was first introduced, and has proven even more unfavorable since. Over 6,000 students, faculty, staff, and community members stated their opposition to the police force in [this petition](#) which has still not been recognized by the Hopkins administration. Multiple [rallies](#) and [protests](#) also highlight disapproval of the private police, yet our institution has done nothing to accept or even acknowledge voices that do not align with plans to create this force. Additionally, we are not satisfied with the “two-year pause” on creation of the force announced in June 2020. We interpret this as a strategic maneuver on the part of the administration to buy time until it is more politically favorable, not a good-faith reconsideration of whether more police is beneficial.

Johns Hopkins claims that it will reimagine policing to increase accountability, yet every action that this University has taken has proven its lack of integrity. During a town hall for medical students this past June, Vice President for Security Connor Scott said in regard to the private police: “As you all know, we set up an accountability board, we have a student advisory committee for security which we'll be submitting applications for this summer. We are going to have an incredibly participative process and be a part of the process and we need your thoughts and your views.” Two months later, the accountability board was [disbanded](#), and the only

avenue listed for community members to give feedback is now through a [form on their website](#). How can we expect the accountability of any future JHPD if its administration will not even take the time to listen to opinions that challenge its plans? With so little transparency now, can we really believe it will appear out of thin air later?

We haven't chosen to become nurses, physicians, researchers, and other healthcare professionals to alleviate only the symptoms of systemic illnesses in our society. We want to get to their root causes. Any reform short of abolishing the private police will only accomplish the former. We urge your favorable recommendation for SB0276.

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2. 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
3. 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

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