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SB 786

Baltimore City – Control of the Police Department of Baltimore City Hearing before the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee, February 11, 2021 Position: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS

The Public Justice Center (PJC) supports local control of police in Baltimore City as a critical component of police accountability, transparency, and reform that is long overdue.

True police reform in the City, the need for which can no longer be denied, cannot be accomplished without local control. The state's control came into existence as a reaction to a corrupt white take-over of city government in the mid-19th century. Now that perhaps laudable effort leaves City residents, the majority of whom are Black, with little say in their own public safety, diluted by the control of the General Assembly, which neither represents nor reflects the people of Baltimore. There is no reason for City residents, alone in the state, to suffer this loss of self-determination and control over their own community.

The lack of local control has concrete consequences. The City government was prevented from enacting its own body camera accountability measure and has been blocked in its efforts to advance the City's compliance with the US DOJ's consent decree on police reform.

The Maryland Coalition for Justice and Police Accountability seeks local control of City police at a critical time for transparency and accountability in policing. During recent years of state control, we have continued to see the over-policing and criminal targeting of Black and brown communities and the inability to rein in violent crime by the scandal-ridden BPD. All while the unjustified police killings of countless individuals in Baltimore, Maryland, and across the nation have been exposed by heinous example after horrid tragedy. Without a return to local control, there will be no improvement and there can be no rebuilding of trust and cooperation between City residents and those sworn to protect and serve. Every other jurisdiction in Maryland controls its own police. Baltimore must also.

SB 786 should be amended to provide for the earliest possible move to local control in 2023. And it should be amended to require the inclusion of community members on the Advisory Board.

The PJC is a non-profit legal advocacy organization dedicated to racial equity and ending poverty. Its Prisoners Rights Project seeks basic justice through reform in our criminal justice system and an end to all unnecessary detention and incarceration. Real police reform is critical to achieving those goals.

The PJC urges a FAVORABLE REPORT on SB 786. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Debra Gardner, Legal Director, at gardnerd@publicjustice.org or 410 625 9409 ext 228.

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