



Testimony in SUPPORT of SB627
Law Enforcement Officers' Bill of Rights - Repeal and Procedures for Discipline
Lydia Walther-Rodriguez, On Behalf of CASA
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

February 3, 2021

Dear Honorable Chairman Smith, Honorable Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee:

CASA is pleased to provide favorable testimony in support of **SB627, Law Enforcement Officers' Bill of Rights - Repeal and Procedures for Discipline**. CASA is the largest immigrant advocacy and services organization in the state of Maryland and in the Mid-Atlantic region, representing over 100,000 Black and Brown immigrants and working families. Our offices provide a variety of different services including ESOL classes, citizenship preparation, tax preparations, health navigation and education, workforce development, legal services and more. Our membership, who is disproportionately impacted in comparison to their white counterparts, has consistently been before the committee testifying to their personal accounts of police misconduct, abuse, and brutality. Many of the interactions that our membership have with the police far too often go unaccounted for.

Consider Ms. Ana Garcia - member for CASA and resident of Montgomery County. Her and her son have directly been impacted by the excessive force that police officers have used in her county. Ms. Garcia was pulled out of her car and thrown to the ground after a traffic stop. During a separate incident, her son was brutalized by multiple officers last November in Germantown - while doing nothing but walking home. Neither Ms. Garcia or her son felt safe reporting their cases to the department as they feared exposing themselves to retaliation, as they felt their cases would be dismissed due to the special privileges given to officers.

We strongly believe that SB627 would be a significant step forward in building transparency and accessing justice for victims of police misconduct - consequently encouraging many communities to regain trust in the system and report the brutality they have undergone.

CASA is also an active member of the Maryland Coalition for Justice and Police Accountability (MCJPA), a statewide coalition of over 90 organizations united to achieve meaningful police reform in Maryland - and includes individuals and family members who have been impacted by police violence, civil rights activists, religious leaders, legal experts advocacy groups, and more. Our organizations are united behind five critical police reforms, including the complete repeal of LEOBR.

Now is the time for Maryland legislators to begin reimagining what discipline of police officers should look like - beginning with the repeal of LEOBR. SB627 minimizes the extent to which law enforcement officers have extra due process rights in disciplinary proceedings that do not apply to other government employees and creates a streamlined system that focuses on the substantive question of guilt or innocence, without

unnecessary procedural barriers that prevent or delay discipline. Extra rights such as the right to delay questions, limits on who can question an officer and right to trial by other officers before an officer can be disciplined are unacceptable and only disrupt and alter the normal process that one should have to endure in seeking justice.

The Maryland LEOBR places Maryland far behind the rest of the nation in police reform efforts, it must be repealed to allow a semblance of accountability for police misconduct. Officers have extreme power in our communities, everyday making life or death decisions. SB627 is critical to ensuring that Maryland stops shielding officers from accountability, when misconduct is committed.

CASA strongly urges a favorable report on SB 627.

Lydia Walther-Rodriguez
Baltimore & central Maryland Region Director, CASA