

Dear Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee,

This testimony is being submitted by Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore, a group of white folks working as part of a multi-racial movement for equity and racial justice in Baltimore City and Baltimore County. We are also working in collaboration with the Campaign for Justice, Safety, and Jobs. I am a resident of MD District 43. I am testifying in **support of Senate Bill 627**.



The residents of Maryland, especially Baltimore City where I live, have been waiting for years for desperately needed meaningful police reform. Every year, we hear from our legislators, sorry, we'd like to help, but we couldn't do it this year. **We are done taking excuses. Get it done.** This is not the first time LEOBR reform has been on the docket. It is in my opinion the most urgent needed legislative reform measure — although there are many. **Show your constituents that you care about the harm done to our communities by unaccountable and untransparent policing by getting this passed, or we will conclude that you do not.**

Senate Bill 627 would repeal the Law Enforcement Officers' Bill of Rights (LEOBR), a law that makes it more difficult to investigate and discipline police misconduct in Maryland than in almost any other state. LEOBR gives special rights to police officers that ordinary people, including other state employees, do not get. It also prevents communities from investigating misconduct that could lead to discipline. For example, under the LEOBR, police abuse can only be investigated by sworn law enforcement. This creates a conflict of interest and raises concerns about transparency.

LEOBR also reduces or eliminates police accountability to the public they are supposed to serve. Because disciplinary procedures are enshrined in LEOBR, civilians have no input into this procedure. Strict time limits on filing complaints mean some investigations are prevented by technicalities. Investigations conducted by civilians cannot result in discipline.

Accountability cannot even be enforced by elected officials. As quoted in the Baltimore Sun, Police Commissioner Michael Harrison has asked that LEOBR be changed to allow him to fire officers after a criminal incident without waiting for a conviction. He noted that the current policy leads to cases such as that of Baltimore Officer Wesley Cagle, who was convicted on first-degree assault charges for shooting an unarmed man, but served on the police force for a further two years between the shooting and his conviction.

In order to respond to protect the public from police misconduct and to address concerns about transparency and accountability, small changes are no longer enough. A complete repeal of LEOBR is urgently needed so the public can know that law enforcement agencies are taking police discipline seriously, and not protecting officers who engage in misconduct.

It is for these reasons that I am encouraging you to vote **in support of Senate Bill 627**.

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Rochkind
755 Melville Ave
Baltimore MD 21218

Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore