

Toby Ditz
Professor Emeritus & Academy Professor, Johns Hopkins University
1416 Bolton St, Baltimore, MD 21217
toby.ditz@jhu.edu / 410-669-0085

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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB276

TO: Chair, William C. Smith, Vice Chair, Jeff Waldstreicher, and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee

As a resident of Baltimore City (D40), and as a faculty member who taught at Johns Hopkins University for 36 years before retiring and still retains an active affiliation there, I strongly support SB276 and the end of the JHU Police Department.

I opposed the original enabling legislation for the JHU Police Department in 2019, and events since have only reinforced my conviction. At the height of the nationwide protests over the police killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and others, over 6000 Baltimoreans and JHU faculty, students, and staff, joined by over two dozen local organizations, signed a petition demanding that the President and the Board of Trustees end the JHU Police Department. The petition and the momentum it generated produced a partial capitulation on the part of the JHU administration, a “suspension” of implementation for three years ([Baltimore Sun](#), June, 2020).

Like the other originators and signers of that [petition](#), I believe we should end the JHU Police Department now, *before* there are boots on the ground. It is wrong for the City of Baltimore, and it sets the wrong precedent. It is also antithetical to every overarching goal of serious reform that we seek to achieve in the legislature this year.

First, the JHU Police Department does not accord with our goal of reducing the systemic racial harms of police violence. The majority of JHU undergraduates and of the Black faculty believe an armed police force will reduce, not enhance safety on campus and in the surrounding neighborhoods. I agree. The record of serious injuries and fatal shootings resulting from the use of excessive force by campus police is disheartening. And, no case is more vivid in the minds of Baltimoreans than the killing of Tyrone West.

Second, accountability is a cornerstone of state-wide police reform initiatives. Yet the authorization of an armed police force run by a private institution moves us in the wrong direction. The residents of Baltimore can vote out a mayor who appoints an ineffective or incompetent police chief. But neither JHU students or employees nor our neighbors can remove the University President who approves the police plan and hires the head of Security.

Simply put, universities are not democratic institutions. For that reason, too, they are not governed by the standards of publicity that in principle apply to public governing bodies. One example is the opaque decision-making that led JHU leadership to call in over eighty members of the Baltimore Police Department to end the Garland Hall sit-in in May 2019, a decision that led to an independent investigation and highly critical [report](#) by an independent fact-finding committee of Homewood Faculty Assembly, of which I am a member. In short, the people's control over a police force run by private institutions is indirect and attenuated.

Similarly, the sheer proliferation of overlapping jurisdictions and competing lines of authority among multiple police departments also make it much harder for Baltimoreans to exert effective oversight over the police in their city. This is especially problematic for the beleaguered residents of adjacent neighborhoods who would have to live under a dual regime: some East Baltimore community organizations are already organizing to forestall the potentially worst effects of simultaneous policing by the BPD and the JHU PD. This patchwork is a roadblock to robust accountability.

Finally, the JHU Police Department is also at direct odds with another fundamental goal of reform: reducing the footprint of policing in favor of a serious commitment to alternative strategies for enhancing public safety. An armed JHU police force seeking to patrol its campus perimeters reinforces the image of Hopkins as a “gated community,” especially among East Baltimoreans, who, remembering the recent history of massive housing displacement, view with suspicion current efforts at redevelopment as a form of gentrification. Ironically, its continuation will *undermine* rather than enhance the efforts of those JHU faculty and staff who are already supporting the development of community-driven alternatives to public safety: good mediation programs, youth education, rapid delivery of mental health services, and more.

Ending the short life of the JHU Police Department should be part of the 2021 session's program of serious police reform. Repeal is a must if we want to ensure that all Baltimoreans, especially its black residents, are safe and have meaningful oversight over all of the armed police in their City.

I urge you to report favorably on **SB276**.