

Dear committee,

As a citizen of Baltimore city, I feel that my testimony must be read regarding the attempt at creating an armed police force on the campuses of Johns Hopkins University. Repealing the bill is must to help ensure community integrity and safety for all peoples living around the campuses. Implementing an armed police force would not only affect the school and its students but also many residents living within reach of each campus. The city of Baltimore already has a police force that is nominally held accountable by the public. Creating a second police force that was privatized and armed would go against the concept of a publicly accountable force beholdng to residents of the city.

In a time of many deaths from homicides, we need safety measures to reduce such human losses. Unfortunately, the rash attempted at providing a greater degree of safety for Johns Hopkins students is not the answer. Why is this? One reason is that Johns Hopkins University has not addressed alternatives in providing a safe environment for its campuses and nearby communities. Some of the most basic of safety measures such as providing adequate lighting have not been researched, let alone implemented. The campuses have too many areas that are unlit and kept closed off, making them potential areas where crimes could occur. The campuses could also use more call boxes, cameras, and other measures for security. Yet the school decided just to create a private police force and ignoring other issues of safety.

Not only would students be affected by a private police force, many residents living either near campuses or in developments would also be in daily contact with such a force. Today the Baltimore City police force provides policing through these communities along with the current Hopkins unarmed security force. Adding a second force would create situations where residents would find themselves interacting with a new police force that would have limited public control, oversight, and lack public information on its operations. Police accountability is vital in fostering a climate of approachable police interactions where the community can learn to trust the police. At least that is a major goal that may or may not be met. Implementing a private police force would go against such a possibility from occurring.

Police alone without community support often fail to reduce homicide and violence rates. While our police force has had major problems with its interactions with the community, there are still attempts at reaching towards a greater community interaction. Its vital not just for crime reduction but for ensuring safety of the city's citizens. This means increasing trust between police and residents, working to reduce or eliminate instances of unwarranted police brutality, and helping the community to see the police as more than enforcers of laws. This means that we need to reform the current police force along with major changes. This would be difficult but it is doable. However, simply ignoring the community-policing model with the implementation of a private police force would be an enanthema to this process.

Creating a police force is a rushed answer with little evidence that it would work. Worse, it would be detrimental to a fragile relationship between the residents of Baltimore and police systems. It would be seen as less accountable and create a potentially more aggressive presence of law enforcers with unknown regard to the rights of residents. Johns Hopkins University needs to examine alternatives in securing its campuses, reach out to nearby communities, and work towards a greater system of engagement with the city. Lets repeal the current law and work towards fairer, more balanced system of safety.