

**Testimony for the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
February 4, 2021**

SB 627– Law Enforcement Officers’ Bill of Rights – Repeal and Procedures for Discipline

FAVORABLE

To Chairman Smith, Vice-Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the Committee,

My name is Beverly John, a concerned citizen and community activists who supports SB 627 that would repeal the Law Enforcement Officers’ Bill of Rights (“LEOBR”) and create a streamlined system without the procedural barriers that prevent discipline. This bill is about racial justice and holding officers accountable for the violence, abuse, and trauma they inflict on the community, mostly Black and Brown residents.

Maryland’s LEOBR is considered to be the most extreme in the country and allows law enforcement officers special due process rights that go beyond what is required under the Constitution. Officers should have the same rights as any other state or local employee, especially since officers have so much power in the community – literally making life or death decisions. They should not be given extra rights.

In Prince George’s County, we are painfully aware of situations where officers who used excessive and lethal force against civilians. These officers have multiple instances of alleged use of excessive force and misconduct issues in their files that ultimately ended with their involvement in the deaths of civilians. Cpl. Michael Owen shot William Green on January 27, 2020 while Mr. Green was hand-cuffed and seat belted in a police cruiser. Previous instances of misconduct were covered by Law Enforcement Officers’ Bill of Rights, as well as Maryland Public Information Act provisions. We can only wonder if things would have turned out differently if these barriers were not in place.

Maryland must also ensure that when LEOBR is repealed, local jurisdictions cannot just recreate LEOBR at the local level. That is why it is important that this bill prohibits local laws and collective bargaining agreements that conflict with the due process rights and procedures laid out in the bill.

SB 627 is a necessary bill so that Maryland finally stops shielding officers from accountability. Now is the time for a full repeal of LEOBR. I urge a favorable vote on SB 627.

Sincerely,

Beverly John