

My name is Caitlin Goldblatt, I am the founder of Scan the Police in Baltimore, Maryland, and I am writing to support SB0276/HB0336. Since my organization began listening to and transcribing police radio traffic in Baltimore City on a near daily basis six months ago, it has further become apparent to me that adding an additional police force to this city will only compound current policing practices that already endanger city residents.

The Baltimore City Police Department (BPD) already receives a budget of over \$500 million annually, the largest police budget per capita in the United States. Charles Village and Abell, two of the neighborhoods immediately surrounding Johns Hopkins University, already have private security officers patrolling those areas. Many of those involved in private security operations are off-duty police officers, and there is no reason to believe that current or former Baltimore City Police Officers would not move from working as private security to joining a private police force at Johns Hopkins University.

Even the potential for overlap here concerns me, as many officers already engage in alarming behavior that actively targets people experiencing homelessness, activists, and Black and brown residents. Since the summer, I have personally heard police officers amassing around groups of roughly one dozen peaceful protesters at a ratio of two officers for every one protester; referring to anyone wearing black clothing as “antifa”; performing stop-and-frisk activities as part of their daily schedules on orders from superiors; responding to reports of drug overdoses without live-saving naloxone that officers are already provided; and arriving at mental health crises with neither medics nor crisis counselors in tow. In one instance of the latter, officers shot a man who experiences schizophrenia and was begging them to leave his home. The man was hospitalized for two weeks, then charged with allegedly brandishing a weapon at the officers who shot him; the State’s Attorney’s Office subsequently dropped the charges against the man.

I know this may seem like a controversial statement, but Baltimore City is already overpoliced. Officers here spend the vast majority of their time going business-to-business on their posts by matter of course, performing traffic stops, sitting on assigned corners to watch people and check for parking violations. They are not preventing violence in the city; almost every time a cop responds to a shooting scene, it is because a “shot spotter” sensor, many of which are placed in designated parts of the city, picked up discharge. If such an instance of violence occurred on a college campus, there would be nothing to stop anyone from calling the Baltimore City Police Department. There is no reason to funnel money into an additional, private police department that would also adhere to the Law Enforcement Officers Bill of Rights, and therefore less accountable than regular security guards are.

Finally, to those convinced a university police force would somehow be gentler or more responsive to its community, I would be remiss to discount the effects of preexisting private police forces in the city. In 2013, at least one Morgan State University police officer participated in the murder of Tyrone West alongside Baltimore City Police officers during a traffic stop. West was not even on the Morgan State University Campus at the time. This officer was not protecting students, nor were they protecting community members. A college campus is a place of learning, and it is as much of a home as anywhere else here. A home is not a place for armed police officers who are empowered to arrest dissidents, cause physical harm to people experiencing mental health crises, or heighten the tension of people just going about their days.

Thank you for your consideration, and I hope you will vote in favor of SB0276/HB0336.