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Committee: Judicial Proceedings

Testimony on: SB178 – “Public Information Act – Personnel Records – Investigations of Law Enforcement Officers (Anton’s Law)”

Position: Support

Hearing Date: January 21, 2021

The Maryland Sierra Club supports SB178 and urges a favorable report.

The Sierra Club is a strong supporter of federal and state policies that increase transparency and public access to documents. We believe that sunlight is the best disinfectant. Over its 125 years, the Sierra Club has been an advocate for government transparency, supporting public information and whistleblower laws at the state and national level.

Environmental activists are often on the front lines of protests, and have been victims of police abuse. So we understand the importance of transparency in cases of police misconduct. We know that when information is kept from the public, it creates a barrier to progress, whether the issue is environmental reforms or police reforms.

The current Maryland Public Information Act (MPIA) process allows critical information about police investigations of misconduct to be kept secret. However, the MPIA process already provides for ways to protect people’s privacy, and that could be applied to police investigations as well.

This bill would create consistency in the implementation of the MPIA and put in place another tool to move toward addressing racial disparities related to policing.

Finally, our support for this bill is part of a Sierra Club’s broader engagement on police reform bills and efforts to center racial and economic justice in our work. The Sierra Club Maryland Chapter works to ensure that all Marylanders grow up in safe, healthy, sustainable communities. We recognize that our state cannot achieve this mission while Black and Brown people experience disproportionate harms in their communities and less reliable access to justice.

In June 4, 2020, the Sierra Club signed a statement of solidarity with the Movement for Black Lives, which begins as follows:

As organizations striving for climate justice and environmental protection, we cannot be silent in the face of the murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, and countless others. This moment has laid bare

Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America’s oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 75,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has over 800,000 members and nearly four million supporters.

the long and shameful history of institutional and systemic racism against Black and Brown people in this country. We demand action.

We urge the Committee to report this bill favorably.

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