



Many struggles, one mission.

Testimony FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS for SB0786

February 9, 2021

Dear members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee,

My name is Abby Cocke, and I am a resident of Baltimore City in District 43. On behalf of Baltimore for Border Justice, a local advocacy and aid organization, I am submitting this testimony in support with amendments for SB0786, *Baltimore City – Control of the Police Department of Baltimore City*.

“The BPD will never be fully accountable to its residents until full control of the Department is returned to the city” – these are the words of the 2018 Community Oversight Task Force (COTF) report, which was mandated by the Department of Justice’s Consent Decree. That Consent Decree, of course, was put in place because of the unconstitutional brutality and racism of the Baltimore Police Department under state rule, thrown into stark relief when the people of the city rose up, unwilling to take it any longer. While local control in itself will not cure our policing ills, it IS a necessary step, and one that can’t come soon enough.

No other jurisdiction in the state, and almost no other city in the country, lacks sovereignty over its own police force the way the residents of Baltimore City currently do. This antiquated and oppressive system frustrates attempts at change and accountability. When we see something wrong that needs fixing, our local elected leaders can shrug their shoulders and pass the buck to a body that only meets 90 days of the year, 30 miles away from Baltimore. Lawmakers from all across the state should not be making decisions that only affect the people of Baltimore – it is an affront to the very idea of self-government. It is for these reasons that we strongly support the part of SB0786 that restores local control of the Baltimore Police Department to the City of Baltimore.

However, we are appalled by the overly drawn-out timeline written into this bill. Four years is far, far too long to wait when urgent changes are needed now. If local control were something brand new and innovative, perhaps we would need that time, but instead it’s something that has been considered for many years already, and we have an abundance of models for what’s working and not working for cities that control their own police forces. **SB0786 should be amended so that local control would be on the 2022 ballot with an implementation date of January 1, 2023.** That would still give the Advisory Board plenty of time to create its report – if the COTF can complete its work on many different aspects of policing in a single year, why do we need a year and a half to study this single, straightforward issue? We can and must continue to study and implement reforms after control of BPD is transferred to the city, and there is no compelling reason to wait four whole years to begin that process.

As for the Advisory Board itself, it is startling to see that its makeup includes so many officials, but does not mandate the inclusion of any community members, such as those who authored the COTF report. The people who are most affected by the issue must have their voices included in the process if we hope to achieve an equitable outcome. **SB0786 should be amended so that community representatives are explicitly included as part of the Advisory Board.**

Thank you for your attention and for doing the right thing.

Sincerely,

Abby Cocke
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