

Written testimony in FAVOR of SB0276 (19 Jan. 2021)

I write to urge the legislature to vote for Sen. Jill Carter’s bill SB0276, which will REPEAL the permission allowing the creation of the Johns Hopkins Private Police.

I write as a member of two communities: firstly, as a Baltimore resident; and secondly, a Johns Hopkins University (JHU) instructor and student. These two communities are often pitted against one another with dire and long-lasting consequences for both groups. Recent revelations about the university’s founder underscored¹ what many lifelong Baltimoreans have known—namely, that the history of JHU in Baltimore is a series of seeing human beings, material resources, and popular and political attention be diverted away from the city and non-affiliate folks, towards the school and those it considers worthy. JHU added to this history in the spring session of 2019 when—through a combination of force, PR campaigning, and implicit favors—it pushed the private police bill through the Maryland state legislature. JHU did this despite the numerous forms of statistical evidence showing that increased policing (especially private policing) does not correspond to any rise in safety or security for those under its radar;² despite community outcry, which was siloed into dead-end town halls and hollow meetings; and despite the objections of those in and outside of the Baltimore and Maryland governments which called attention to the appalling double-standard which the university played into as they fast-tracked their bill. All this was done while JHU praised, through the other side of its mouth, the racial justice work by Black Lives Matter in response to police violence upon Black civilians.

Repealing their bill is vital to a healthier, safer community. Such a community would include everyone across Baltimore, working towards breaking down the bubble which allows JHU students, faculty, and affiliates to be tourists in a city they feel no responsibility toward. The danger of a private police force, as community members and outside allies have detailed, falls unequally on Black and brown people who make up a far larger percentage of the non-affiliate population than the university’s.³ There is no angle from which adding further armed police, with

¹ See, among others, <https://www.baltimoresun.com/maryland/baltimore-city/bs-md-ci-hopkins-slavery-reaction-20201211-hs5okaao2zbcpkldqailuzl774-story.html>.

² See, among others, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011128710382263>; <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11292-014-9210-y>; and essays (and further quantitative data citations) in *Policing the Planet*, edited by Jordan T. Camp and Christina Heatherton (2016), especially Ch. 5 on the Baltimore Uprising and Chs. 14 and 16 on so-called “community policing” as red herrings. UPDATE: On further lack of accountability, see also the report published 19 Jan. 2021 on records of police misconduct complaints filed against the BPD in the last 5 years alone:

<https://www.aclu-md.org/en/publications/chasing-justice-addressing-police-violence-and-corruption-maryland>.

³ See, among others, <https://www.asanet.org/sites/default/files/savvy/images/press/docs/pdf/ASARaceCrime.pdf>; and <https://www.pnas.org/content/116/34/16793>.

so little accountability and so great a likelihood for predictable, unjust, and atrocious results for the very people who suffer most often, would solve any of the problems it purports to address. The university, of course, can dredge up individual speakers on behalf the police force, because there are real problems both inside the university and across the city. But JHU has not invested either time, research, or sincere energy into any other solutions—solutions which could moot the enormous and obvious harm that such an armed, private force introduces simply by existing.

To treat each other truly as good neighbors, rather than as competitors for finite goods and mayoral or gubernatorial support, JHU must not be allowed to erect further walls which criminalize any mixing or sharing between us all. In the past several years, Baltimore has demonstrated the need for radical, compassionate, innovative solutions to healing the scars that armed violence and over-policing both have left on the city. Our collective will, resources, and focus needs to be on working together for such creative care.

In short, the JHU private police bill must be repealed, for everyone's good.

*“That time
we all heard it,
cool and clear,
cutting across the hot grit of the day.
The major Voice.
The adult Voice
forgoing Rolling River,
forgoing tearful tale of bale and barge
and other symptoms of an old despond.
Warning, in music-words
devout and large,
that **we are each other's**
harvest:
we are each other's
business:
we are each other's
magnitude and bond.”*

—Gwendolen Brooks, “Paul Robeson”

Thank you.