



February 11, 2021

Honorable Senator William C. Smith, Jr.
Chair, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 East
Annapolis, MD 21401

**Re: Testimony in SUPPORT of SB786 – Baltimore City – Control of the Police
Department of Baltimore City**

Dear Chair William C. Smith, Jr. and Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee Members:

On behalf of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, I thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill **SB 786** with amendments, sponsored by Senator Cory McCray, to make the Baltimore City Police Department (BPD) a City agency. CAIR is America's largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization.

This bill is critical because after 160 years, it would finally restore control of the police department to the City of Baltimore and foster public accountability and trust between city residents and the BPD.

I was born and raised in Baltimore, Maryland. I attended Steuart Hill and Franklin Square Elementary Schools, West Baltimore Middle School and Western High School. Growing up, I personally witnessed and experienced the harmful impact of mistrust in law enforcement officers in my neighborhood prompted by the lack of transparency, accountability and reliability. It hindered community safety and effective policing methods.

For over a century and a half, BPD has been the only local police department in Maryland designated as a state agency - thus, prohibiting Baltimore's Mayor and City Council from implementing meaningful policy changes that influence policing. Such measures must instead go through the General Assembly - a body that only meets for 90 days annually and is far removed from Baltimore. SB786 sets a path for restoring to Baltimore the same degree of control over its police as other jurisdictions.

CAIR is part of the Maryland Coalition for Justice and Police Accountability. The coalition's position is that SB 786 should be amended so that the issue of local control can be included on the 2022 ballot with an implementation date of January 1, 2023. We are also concerned that the advisory board does not explicitly include community members. This bill should be amended to remedy that.

SB 786 would positively contribute to effective policing in Baltimore and enable local lawmakers to take steps to enact meaningful reforms. I respectfully urge the committee to issue a favorable report on this legislation with amendments to shorten the implementation timeline to 2023 and include community members in the Advisory Board.

Sincerely,

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