

To: Senator William C. Smith and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee
From: Li Chen, MPH; Student at the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine and former student at the School of Public Health
Date: January 19, 2021
Re: Support for SB 0276, to Repeal the Johns Hopkins Police Department (JHPD)

I am a public health professional, medical student, and concerned resident of Baltimore writing to **strongly support SB0276 to repeal provisions related to the establishment and maintenance of a Johns Hopkins Police Department (JHPD)**. As a trainee at Johns Hopkins Hospital and concerned resident who has lived near both East Baltimore and Homewood campuses, I have no doubt that the creation of JHPD would exacerbate longstanding wounds between the University/Hospital and surrounding communities, perpetuate police violence, and threaten the safety and health of all of us but especially of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities.

While individual police officers may be against racism, policing systems in the US are founded on an agenda of surveillance based on race and class – and the JHPD would be no different. My Black and Brown friends, mentors, neighbors, and patients feel this surveillance. My Black and Brown classmates, professors, and attending physicians share how they must put in extra effort to dress formally when walking on campus, in the hospital, and around the city so as to not be targeted. My Black and Brown patients share how they feel when they experience physical force to quell their “aggression” and “belligerence” as they appropriately request pain medications after a traumatic accident or surgery. (As an aside, while trainings on implicit bias and microaggressions help, no training can do away the racist origins of policing in the US which have so seeped into every aspect of its daily operations). My Black and Brown friends who are historical residents of the Middle East neighborhood – where more than 700 families were displaced in the early 2000s as Johns Hopkins Hospital was expanding, a fact that Hopkins still chooses to ignore – have received threats from various members of the Hopkins institution as they defend against schemes to continue to displace other families that have inhabited East Baltimore for generations.

Policing has often been used in conjunction with other efforts to gentrify communities and “rid” communities of members that are seen as less profitable to an institution – and the JHPD would be no different. In fact, in considering other actions of the Hopkins institution – including the historical and continued displacement of poor families in the Middle East, the suing of indigent patients in East Baltimore for medical debt leading to many of their bankruptcy and now homelessness, all while Hopkins receives large sums of money from the State to provide in charity care – it is clear that the creation of a JHPD constitutes part of a larger racist and classist agenda to displace surrounding poor communities and communities of color.

As the events of this year have illuminated, more than ever, the disproportionate threat of policing to the lives and health of Black and Brown communities, the unfortunate reality is that unjustified shootings and/or killings are likely if a Hopkins police force were to proceed. Furthermore, it would destroy any efforts that Hopkins has made to mend relationships with marginalized communities of Baltimore, to care for its own students, faculty, and staff – as we have made it clear through numerous petitions, calls, and protests which the Hopkins administration has repeatedly chosen to ignore – to diversify its workforce, to fight against health inequities, and to stay true to its mission of “improving the health of our community and the world”. It is hard to overstate the devastating impacts that a Hopkins police force would have on us, on our communities (both within and outside of Hopkins), and even on the Hopkins reputation and on setting precedents for further private policing in the US. On the other hand, repealing the provisions would allow us to begin to imagine alternatives to policing that are rooted in equity and justice, and to use the funds that would be dedicated to JHPD to improving patient care and education, improving our communities, and addressing dire social issues that are killing the lives of so many. I therefore stand by my many friends and colleagues in urging you to strongly support this bill.