



**Testimony for the House Judiciary Committee
February 9, 2021**

**HB 120 – Public Information Act – Personnel Records – Investigations of Law Enforcement Officers
(Anton’s Law)**

FAVORABLE

To Chairman Clippinger, Vice Chair Atterbeary, and Committee members:

Quaker Voice of Maryland submits this written testimony in support of HB 120 (Anton’s Law).

Quaker Voice of Maryland was formed by Quaker Meetings throughout the State of Maryland to give Maryland Quakers a more effective voice in state-level issues that speak to our values. Our faith as Quakers includes the commitment to build a more peaceful and equitable society through legislation and policies that affect human dignity, well-being, and non-violence.

HB 120 will serve Marylanders in this important way: it makes it possible for communities and complainants to know whether police misconduct is investigated fully and fairly. This is balanced fairness that does justice to both citizens and police officers because of the tremendous power police officers wield, and in light of the horrific public record of legitimate concerns about police departments’ ability to investigate their own.

Currently, if a citizen files a complaint of police misconduct, they are unable to access the adjudication process in relation to their complaint. The only information they can obtain is the disciplinary outcome; one is unable to assess whether the department conducted a thorough or lackluster investigation of their complaint. This is due to the complaint file being considered a “personnel record” under Maryland’s Public Information Act, and personnel records may never be disclosed. HB 120 removes the complaint file from the improper protections of the personnel record category.

Transparency is necessary to rebuild public trust that police departments work for all of us in Maryland. Sunlight is an excellent disinfectant, because injustice, cruelty and malfeasance shun the sunlight. A process for fair public access is necessary to assure citizens that their complaints are taken seriously, investigated thoroughly without bias, and that officers who are found to have violated law and department policies are sanctioned appropriately. Ultimately this benefits us all – residents, communities, police officers generally, and public support for policing as a societal institution.

The state of Maryland ranks among the least transparent states in its treatment of police misconduct complaints. Twenty-nine other states make disclosure of complaint files more accessible to the public. Even politically conservative states such as Alabama, Georgia, and Arizona, make police disciplinary records generally available to the public. Maryland residents deserve no less transparency to its residents.

Pass HB 120, for it is necessary to help identify police misconduct patterns and to root out bad actors who overstep their authority.

In Light,

Molly Finch

Clerk, Quaker Voice of Maryland