

02/19/21

Juna Donegan's Testimony on HB 0336 - Congressional District 7

Dear Maryland House of Delegates

I am a resident of Charles Village and live on 31st street only a couple blocks from the Hopkins homewood campus. I am writing to urge your support of House Bill 0336 to prevent the creation of a dangerous and unaccountable Johns Hopkins University private police force.

If this bill is not passed, armed JHU campus police will be permitted to patrol city streets in Baltimore without the explicit requirement that they comply with the accountability measures detailed in the federal consent decree issued in *United States v. Police Department of Baltimore City*. Compliance with the consent decree should be the bare minimum requirement for any armed security force in Baltimore, a city whose black citizens live in fear of a heavily armed and notoriously corrupt police force every day. JHU has used violent crime as the primary justification for their police force, yet their officers will not actually be allowed to intervene legally in these sorts of crimes. JHU has used the threat of violent crime to try and scare citizens into supporting their private police force, but their force will only be legally allowed to respond to a few of these crimes. This internal conflict will surely result in illegal and untoward collaboration between BPD and the JHU private force. JHU already has a security force of over 1,000 personnel, including 63 unarmed officers with arrest powers and 63 armed off-duty BPD officers and deputies. If they already have a security force of this size and public safety is still such an enormous issue, could it be that a larger security force does not always correspond with greater public safety?

Public safety is a critical shared goal of everyone who lives, works, and attends school in Baltimore City. Everyone wants safe neighborhoods; and safe neighborhoods are ones that are both free of violent crime and unlawful policing practices. Time and again in Baltimore City, we have seen approaches to public safety that have done anything but make low-income communities of color feel safer, such as discriminatory practices against Black residents; unlawful stops, searches, and arrests; and excessive force, all described at length in the U.S. Department of Justice's (DOJ) 2016 report on its investigation of the BPD. If JHU was actually interested in the safety of all the citizens of Baltimore city, they would put their significant capital and political power into further supporting community centers, businesses, and schools, and into building egalitarian relationships with Baltimore city organizations who are already fighting for humane and useful solutions to violence in Baltimore.

I share JHU's concern for student safety as well as the concerns of the many JHU faculty and students who say a private campus police force is not the answer. Community members and organizations have been vehemently opposed to the JHU police force since its inception. Community organizations have consistently been kept in the dark about Hopkins plans.

Supporting House Bill 0336 will protect and support the many neighborhood organizations and community members who have rallied in opposition to a private JHU police force. Passing this bill will prevent the wave of racial profiling and violent police murders which will surely follow should a JHU police force be created.

I hope that my testimony is instructive in the passage of this bill.

Respectfully,

Juna Donegan
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