

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,

My name is Rev. Marguerite Morris and I live in Odenton, Maryland. I am the founder of For Kathy’s Sake, Community Actively Seeking Transparency (C.A.S.T.), and the mother of a deceased young woman named Katherine Sarah Morris. I have been in an eight-year legal battle with police calling for greater transparency and accountability in matters related to her death. This is my testimony in support of HB 120 (Anton’s Law).

My organization is in part made up of persons impacted by bad policing. So, I know first the behind-the-scenes traumatization that occurs when those that have harmed others go unpunished. I know firsthand the tears of mothers that felt they couldn’t protect their children from the abuse of a bad police officer. They made their complaints, they followed the process, they’ve written their letters, cried their tears and carried their protest signs. But after all of that there comes a form letter that doesn’t even give them the dignity of saying you have been heard or someone, anyone has been held accountable for their actions against you, and/or your loved one. You are a victim with a faceless perpetrator.

My organization recently met with the Internal Affairs Department of the Anne Arundel County Police Department about how their Internal Affairs handles incoming complaints. They did not even have in place a written form that recorded what a complainant had complained about, or who they had complained on, that was given to the complainant at the time of their complaint. That police department was founded in 1937. How is it that in 2020 that police were not even acknowledging, in writing to the complainant, this information? It is completely left up to them how they categorized the incoming complaints on an officer. That is too much internal control. Too much internal decisions making shielded from the public’s eyes. The complaining person never sees how their complaint was categorized, labeled, filed, addressed or even tracked. No external record of how many times the offender has offended.

The state of Maryland ranks among the least transparent states in regards to police misconduct complaints. Twenty-nine other states make disclosure of complaint files more accessible to the public. Even in so-called conservative states such as Alabama, Georgia, and Arizona, police disciplinary records are generally available to the public.

We are pushing for the expeditious and timely passage of HB 120 as a “Common-Sense” measure designed to help identify police misconduct patterns and root out bad actors before more Black and Brown people will be brutalized, assaulted, and killed in our communities. In addition, HB 120 will help build trust between the community and Law-Enforcement. To do that, we must have a more transparent and accountable system to the citizenry that funds it.

We must stop continuing to empower abusers to abuse. Police, policing themselves continue to give rise to conflicts of interest that have become a barrier to oversight in my own county. We as a Nation must rise up and do better. I charge you that as this country continues to cry out for justice for the unjust killing, or beating, or knee necking of our children, that you rise to the occasion and allow this bill to go forward and be enacted into law.

As an impacted voter and community leader, I urge a favorable vote on HB 120.

Thank you,

The Mother of Katherine Sarah Morris,

Marguerite Morris and the Friends of "For Kathy's Sake