

Testimony in Support of HB 151
House Judiciary Committee

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Good afternoon Chairman Clippinger, Vice Chairman Atterbeary and members of the House Judiciary Committee. As a resident of Prince George's County since 1979 I have witnessed a continual problem with justice. Police officers who have killed residents have never been held accountable and for this reason our county includes the national leaders of the Coalition of Concerned Mothers, an organization of mothers whose children have been murdered by police. In Baltimore Tawanda Jones has held weekly protests and meetings for over seven years seeking justice for the murder of Tyrone West. The murder of Prince Jones a student at Howard University sparked protest and is powerfully recounted in Ta-Nehisi Coates book, *Between the World and Me*. There have also been countless episodes of police committing assault including the notorious "Dirty Dozen" covered by the Washington Post's Reuben Castaneda in the 90s and continuing to the present. Throughout this time the police have been protected by multiple parts of the criminal legal system but Maryland leads other states by also having the Law Enforcement Officers Bill of Rights (LEOBOR) which allows police to further lie and hide their guilt from the public.

As legislators you must be aware of the long struggle by residents in Maryland to repeal LEOBOR. Following the murder of Freddie Gray in Baltimore substantial organizing by many groups including the Prince George's Peoples' Coalition raised the issue to such a high level that special hearings were held prior to the legislative session. Despite major protests in Annapolis and the uprising in Baltimore we were only able to shorten the time police actions can be hidden from 10 days to 5 days. It should now be clear to all that racist police violence is a threat to our society. The murder of George Floyd and other events this summer called forth even more protest in the streets and emergence of a large multiracial movement against police brutality. And it is not just Black Lives Matter that raises the issue. The American Public Health Association (APHA) has 30,000 members and has passed resolutions against both police violence and mass incarceration that demand that our neighborhoods be rid of racist policing.(1) The health of the public requires major change in the criminal legal system. Repealing LEOBOR is a small but necessary step towards a more just society. This year we expect to see this legislation repealed altogether.

- (1) www.endingpoliceviolence.com ("Advancing Public Health Interventions to Address the Harms of the Carceral System". AND "Addressing Law Enforcement Violence as a Public Health Issue")

