

Dear Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

I am a resident of MD District 21 and have lived in Maryland most of my 70 years. I am a member of Showing Up for Racial Justice Annapolis and Anne Arundel County. I am **testifying to ask you to amend SB0627/HB0151**, which would repeal the Law Enforcement Officers' Bill of Rights (LEOBR), a law that makes it more difficult to investigate and discipline police misconduct in Maryland than in almost any other state. Specifically, I am asking you to remove the FOP amendments and amend language to add external civilian oversight boards with investigatory and discipline powers.

LEOBR gives special rights to police officers that ordinary people, including other state employees, do not get. It also prevents communities from investigating misconduct that could lead to discipline. For example, under the LEOBR, police abuse can only be investigated by sworn law enforcement. This creates a conflict of interest and raises concerns about transparency.

LEOBR also reduces or eliminates police accountability to the public they are supposed to serve. Because disciplinary procedures are enshrined in LEOBR, civilians have no input into this procedure. Strict time limits on filing complaints mean some investigations are prevented by technicalities. Investigations conducted by civilians cannot result in discipline.

Accountability cannot even be enforced by elected officials. As quoted in the Baltimore Sun, Police Commissioner Michael Harrison has asked that LEOBR be changed to allow him to fire officers after a criminal incident without waiting for a conviction. He noted that the current policy leads to cases such as that of Baltimore Officer Wesley Cagle, who was convicted on first-degree assault charges for shooting an unarmed man, but served on the police force for a further two years between the shooting and his conviction.

In order to respond to protect the public from police misconduct and to address concerns about transparency and accountability, small changes are no longer enough. A complete repeal of LEOBR is urgently needed so the public can know that law enforcement agencies are taking police discipline seriously, and not protecting officers who engage in misconduct.

It is for these reasons that I am encouraging you to amend SB0627/HB0151. Specifically, I am asking you to remove the FOP amendments and amend language to add external civilian oversight boards with investigatory and discipline powers.

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Linda K. Girdner, Ph.D.  
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