

**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 Greta Willis, mother of Kevin L. Cooper. I am also a volunteer with Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America and the co-founder of the Kevin L. Cooper Foundation created in my son's name. I live in Baltimore, Maryland. I am testifying in support of HB 120 (Anton’s Law).

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.

Once a citizen in our state 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.

On Saturday, August 12th, 2006, my 15-year-old son was shot and killed by an inexperienced Baltimore City police officer with one year on the force. My son was experiencing a mental health crisis. I called the police seeking help for Kevin. Instead of receiving help, Kevin, while holding a plastic dustpan, was maced and shot in my home, in front of me, as I was holding my 10-month-old granddaughter. Two officers initially responded but one officer left stating “the call was abated”, meaning it was over. The other officer stayed and antagonized Kevin, then shot and killed him. I ask you, If the officer was in danger, why would his partner leave him, a rookie, on the scene alone? That one officer became the judge, the jury, and executioner of Kevin's life. The officer was not brought up on any charges.

During the hearing, my family was offered \$10,000 to settle the case but we refused. There is no police accountability in the Baltimore City Police Department. The department should have investigated our case further instead of covering it up and declaring it a justifiable homicide on the same day the shooting took place. Please explain to me: How can you justify a homicide that just occurred at 9:30 a.m. that same day? Impossible. Why? Where is the investigation? Where is the transparency? And, where is accountability? I urge you all to make police accountability your number one priority to save the lives of our children. Police violence is gun violence. And, we cannot end gun violence without addressing the crisis.

Now is the time for a statewide use of force standard that holds officers accountable when they use unlawful force, and ensures that officers will do everything they need to do in order to preserve human life. I urge a favorable vote on HB 139.

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.

Sincerely,
Greta Willis