

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,

Hi, my name is Josette Blocker, I'm a constituent of district 23A and the aunt of Demonte Ward Blake.

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.

As a result of police misconduct and unnecessary force, my nephew is now paralyzed. It’s incredibly important that the we--the community have access to both unsustained and sustained complaints because we know nearly 90% of complaints made against police by the public are unsustained. There were nearly 7,000 use of force complaints filed in this county alone in just the last 3-4 years and 99.6% of those complaints were "justified". That is insane!!! I encourage the rest of this delegation to pledge your support to pass Anton's Law this session.

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 are 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,
Josette Blocker