



LARRY HOGAN
GOVERNOR

STATE HOUSE
100 STATE CIRCLE
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401-1925
(410) 974-3901
(TOLL FREE) 1-800-811-8336

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March 9, 2021

Chair Luke Clippinger
Vice Chair Vanessa Atterbeary
Room 101, House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

House Bill 1236 - Office of the Attorney General - Violent Crimes Special Prosecution Unit for Baltimore City

POSITION: Support

Dear Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Atterbeary, and Members of the Committee:

The Administration supports House Bill 1236 - Office of the Attorney General - Violent Crimes Special Prosecution Unit for Baltimore City. House Bill 1236 would establish a specialized prosecution unit for Baltimore City within the Office of the Attorney General, and would provide funding so a team of prosecutors could focus on targeting violent offenders in that jurisdiction. This bill codifies an initiative that the Governor supported in 2020.

In 2020, Baltimore City experienced 335 murders, with 296 involving the use of a firearm. This marked the sixth year in a row where the City had over 300 murders. Despite a global pandemic, violent crime continues to wreak havoc on the City and requires an all-hands-on-deck approach to ensure that Baltimore City residents and Marylanders are safe. House Bill 1236 adds another tool to the toolbox that the State can utilize as we continue to address the issue of violent crime.

Governor Hogan, pursuant to Article V, §3, of the Maryland Constitution, sent a letter to Attorney General Frosh in September 2019 directing him to independently investigate and prosecute crimes of violence, crimes related to firearms, and organized crime within Baltimore City. In response, Attorney General Frosh stated that he needed additional resources to comply with the Governor's directive. The Governor's Fiscal Year 2021 budget originally funded this initiative and would have created 25 positions, but due to the unanticipated budget shortfall caused by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the funding was cut at the July 1, 2020 Board of Public Works meeting.

The Hogan Administration remains committed to addressing violent crime and has provided additional prosecutorial resources at the federal, local, and now state level. At the federal level, the U.S. Attorney's Office receives funding for federal prosecutors to prosecute firearms charges under Project EXILE and the Baltimore City State's Attorney's Office is one of two State's Attorney's Offices in the State that receive dedicated funding in the Governor's budget.

For these reasons, the Administration respectfully requests a favorable report on House Bill 1236. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Erin Chase, Governor's Legislative Office, at 410-974-3336 or erin.chase1@maryland.gov.

Sincerely,
Keiffer J. Mitchell, Jr.
Chief Legislative Officer

