

Testimony for the House Judiciary Committee
February 9, 2021
HB 139 –Law Enforcement Officers--Use of Force
FAVORABLE

To Chairman Clippinger, Vice Chair Atterbeary, and Committee members,

My name is Tawanda Jones and I reside in the 45th Legislative District of Baltimore City, Maryland. I'm formally submitting my written testimony in support of HB 139 on Use of Force.

As you know, Maryland does not have statutory limits on use of force, and the Supreme Court cases fail to adequately protect the lives and safety of Maryland residents. Instead of merely codifying Graham and Garner into state law, we must elevate the "objectively reasonable" standard to prohibit officers from using force unless it is necessary as a last resort, under the totality of the circumstances, after the officer has exhausted de-escalation and other reasonable alternatives. Although there are other necessary components to a robust use of force statute, failing to change the legal standard will maintain the status quo and let officers remain unaccountable for the harm they cause.

For the last 393 weeks, I have been fighting for justice for my Brother, Tyrone West. Tyrone was brutally murdered by 11-15 officers in broad daylight in a residential neighborhood in my district. For the last 7 and a half years, my family has endured corruption that should be considered criminal, as well as every form of road block you can imagine on our journey to accountability and justice.

Enough is enough! There is no statute of limitations on murder. No one that participates in a murder should be shielded from accountability because of what their occupation is. No One! That includes police officers. They wield so much power, and weapons that they should be held to a higher standard of conduct, not shielded from responsibility for their actions of brutality against citizens. Tyrone deserves Justice. All victims of police brutality do.

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.

Thank you.
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