

Dear Judiciary Committee Members,

We are residents and community leaders of Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore (SURJ) in District 46. SURJ District 46 has over 250 active members and we often partner with religious communities and organizations through the District.

We are testifying in support of HB0120 which will reform the Maryland Public Information Act. We request that you commit to reforming the MPIA because police accountability on a local level is impossible without it.

Currently, police misconduct investigations are considered "personnel records" and thus are not available for request under the Public Information Act. Passage of this policy will change this definition, resulting in an increase in police accountability, by ensuring victims and the media can get the details of how an investigation of complaints of police misconduct are handled. Additionally, it is imperative this legislation includes both sustained and unsustained cases, so citizens can get a full picture of an officer's history. Also, it's vital that unsustained complaints are covered, since they constitute the vast majority of complaints and can indicate or refute a pattern of misconduct.

Secrecy undermines community trust in police at a time when police departments should be mending and improving their relationships with the communities they are sworn to protect. In addition, Maryland ranks among the least transparent states with regard to police misconduct complaints. If police departments are investigating officer misconduct thoroughly, there should be nothing to hide.

It is for these reasons that we are encouraging you to vote in support of HB0120 to reform the Maryland Public Information Act.

We appreciate your time, service, and consideration. Thank you for your leadership and willingness to make the bold changes necessary to achieve racial justice in our state and in our city!

Sincerely,
SURJ District 46 Community Leaders
Sarah Goldman
Christina Pham Linhoff
Ben Goldberg
Liz Simon-Higgs
Brian Seel
Lilly Chappa
Natalia Skolnik
Lindsay Keipper