

COMMUNITY JUSTICE

Prince George's County, MD

SB 178/ HB 120

Public Information Act – Personnel Records – Investigations of Law Enforcement Officers (Anton's Law)

January 21, 2021

Position: Support

Community Justice supports HB 120, a bill that would allow formal complaints of job-related misconduct of law enforcement officers to be public information.

We are a group of organizations and concerned community members who are dedicated to ensuring police accountability in Prince George's County. Our organization centers and uplifts people of color and those impacted by the criminal legal system.

For decades, the Prince George's County Police Department (PGCPD) has continuously broken the trust of the community. As you may know, in 2004 the Department of Justice issued a consent decree with PGCPD because of the inhumane practices of law enforcement officers. In addition, recently, fellow PGCPD officers filed a lawsuit alleging misconduct in the department not only amongst officers of color but also community members of color. It is evident through multiple police reform efforts including the July 2020 Police Reform Work Group, that it will take foundational shifts – not piecemeal incrementalism – to reconstruct the systemic issues between law enforcement and Maryland residents. Transparency and accountability are the keys to this shift.

Our communities deserve full transparency about police misconduct and investigations to heal the harm done by law enforcement officers. The Maryland Public Information Act would allow details about misconduct and investigations to become public information instead of classifying it as a sealed personnel record. As it stands, community members are only allowed to know the outcome of the investigation and not details about the thoroughness of the investigation. Those who have been harmed by the police should be able to know if their cases and complaints are taken seriously and that law enforcement officers are truly being held accountable for their actions.

Advocates have been pushing for community-centered reform to the Maryland Public Information Act and yet it has not passed. Maryland cannot afford to wait for another state or national uprising or yet another family losing their loved one to wait for the right time to pass legislation that will bring the community accountability.

Sincerely,

Community Justice