

**Testimony for the House Judiciary Committee
February 5, 2021**

HB 151– Law Enforcement Officers' Bill of Rights - Repeal

FAVORABLE

To Chairman Cippinger, Vice Chair Atterbeary and members of this Committee:

My name is Jonathan W. Hutto, Sr. and I live in Suitland Maryland where I coordinate a Voluntary-Cooperative-Collective group of Organizations and laypersons concerned known as the Prince George's People's Coalition. I am testifying in support of SB 627 to repeal the Law Enforcement Officers' Bill of Rights ("LEOBR") and create a streamlined system without the procedural barriers that prevent discipline. This bill is about racial justice and holding officers accountable for the violence, abuse, and trauma they inflict on the community, mostly Black and Brown residents.

In January 2001, as a young Membership Program Coordinator for Amnesty International USA's Mid-Atlantic Regional Office, I along with activists from Southern Prince George's County travelled to Annapolis advocating for much needed reforms to LEOBR-a bill proposed by then House Delegate Rushern Baker. The bill never made it out of the House Judiciary Committee. This was at a time when Prince George's County's Police Department was deemed to have been the most murderous out of the top 50 Departments in the country-an analysis done by the Washington Post in the Summer of 2001. Stolen Lives such as Archie Elliott, Gary Hopkins and Prince Jones, taken from us during this period now serve as celebrated and eternally uplifted martyrs for us today. In subsequent years we consistently came back to Annapolis advocating for much needed reforms. Sadly and disgracefully it took a People's Rebellion in Baltimore in the aftermath of Freddie Gray's horrendous death at the hands of Police in the Spring of 2015 to force legislators in Annapolis to finally consider any modicum measures of Police Reform. In the 2016 Legislative Session, we had 25 Police Reform measures introduced with two pieces of legislation actually passing-one which reduced the 10 Day Waiting Period within LEOBR to a 5-Day Waiting Period. Needless to say, the Culture of State Sanctioned Violence upon the masses of a disproportionate Black Citizenry is deeper and more profound than Waiting Periods for Police to be questioned after an act of excessive force. Our collective Lived Experience in the State of Maryland demonstrates LEOBR to be the codification of the Blue Wall of Silence within the Law. We applaud the House Speaker in calling for the Abolishment of this Law in Solidarity with the many Families who have lost loved ones to State Sanctioned Police Murder-Violence and with a National-Localized Movement fighting for the Survival and Forward Progress of all Black Lives.

I believe officers should have the same rights and not be treated differently than any other layperson concerned especially since officers have so much power in the community – literally making life or death decisions. They should not be given special rights. Maryland must ensure that when LEOBR is repealed, local jurisdictions cannot just recreate LEOBR at the local level. That is why it is important that this bill prohibits local laws and collective bargaining agreements that conflict with the due process rights and procedures laid out in the bill. Case in point: HB1016-passed in the 2016 Legislative Session which empowered Chiefs of Police to appoint Citizens to internal Police Trial Boards has yet to actually be implemented within Prince George's County. This is due in large measure to the collective bargaining agreements advocated by the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) which has effectively nullified state law-a moral and ethical disgrace.

SB 627 is a necessary bill so that Maryland finally stops shielding officers from accountability. Now is the time for a full repeal of LEOBR. I urge a favorable vote on SB 627.

Sincerely,

Jonathan W. Hutto, Sr.
Prince George's People's Coalition