

**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 members of the Committee,

My name is Beverly John. I am submitting this testimony in support of HB 139 Law Enforcement Officers – Use of Force legislation. Maryland is one of only nine states without a statewide use of force law. This is unconscionable. Your constituents are being traumatized and oppressed by local, county and state law enforcement officers who have the ability to make life and death decisions with no accountability for unintentional, and at times intentional, harm. You have heard from directly impacted families over the years, brave enough to speak about their experiences. There are many, many others who have been afraid to speak out because of intimidation and harassment by the culprits. However, more are finding their voices to speak out after the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery catapulted the issue into the international spotlight.

In Maryland, it is reported that 90% of complaints against officers made by the public are not sustained. However, as a resident of Prince George's County, I have seen the impact that over-policing and harassment has had on our community over the last 23 years. During street outreach to serve those in need, I hear and see the frustration of our neighbors. I see the hurt and despair of those who just want to enjoy basic rights within their community without harassment. I have been given a first-hand glimpse into the lack of trust the community has for law enforcement across the State. The complaint processes lack transparency and accountability. We see cases where officers have engaged repeatedly in misconduct, even criminal misconduct that was known to the department, but the cases were acquitted. How is the community to place any trust in law enforcement when they are not held accountable? In the State, 80% of exonerees are Black, with officer misconduct as the leading reason for exoneration. We cannot continue to allow officers who bring personal bias and bigotry to the job to prey on our community.

As you are aware, there is national (and international) attention on police reform, with a very recent focus on nationalist and terrorist influences within police departments. In support of the true and dedicated law enforcement officers we know and appreciate, no one should have to work in such toxicity. Multiple use of force complaints and involvement in cases where lethal force has been used should be red flags to the danger an officer may represent. Hiding these incidents in "personnel" files is an impediment to obtaining justice for families and the community at large. Transparency is the key. We have one more time to pass legislation that will help our community, as well as those officers who must work with other officers who do harm to the community.

We need this legislation, in addition to the repeal of the Law Enforcement Officer's Bill of Rights (HB151) and Reform of the Maryland Public Information Act (HB0120) legislation, to begin to truly make meaningful and real change to identify and hold individuals accountable for the terror and trauma they inflict on communities.

Thank you.

Beverly John
Concerned Citizen