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THINK JEWISHLY. ACT LOCALLY.

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HBI20/SB178

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

TO: Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Atterbeary, and members of the Judiciary Committee

FROM: Samantha Blau, on behalf of Jews United for Justice (JUFJ)

My name is Samantha Blau, I am a resident of Baltimore's Patterson Place neighborhood in District 46. I am co-chair of the Justice System Reform & Immigrant Rights Team of Jews United for Justice (JUFJ). JUFJ organizes more than 5,500 Jewish Marylanders and allies in support of local and state campaigns for social, racial, and economic justice. I am also a former educator with over ten year's experience working with students and teachers in Baltimore City and across the state of Maryland. I am providing this testimony on behalf of JUFJ in support of Anton's Law, HBI20/SB178.

Rabbi Tarfon taught us that "it is not your responsibility to finish the work [of perfecting the world], but neither are you free to desist from it." Following the words of Rabbi Tarfon, I know that this committee cannot fix everything, but it can take a major step towards making a difference. Passing HBI20/SB178 is that major step.

As an educator, I have taught students that just because the language used to describe a scientific law sounds complicated it does not mean it cannot be simply demonstrated. Maxwell's equations describe the relationship between magnetism and electricity, and while a fourth grader may not be able to reproduce the mathematics they can appreciate the demonstration of using an electric current to make two pieces of metal magnetic. Anton's Law describes how the citizenry can expect to hold an armed police force accountable for potentially deadly acts. I may not be able to reproduce a description of "deadly force" as a lawyer could, but I have, unfortunately, seen multiple demonstrations of what happens when police who go unchecked harm and kill my fellow citizens.

I believe that right now the only thing standing between myself and harm from a police officer is the color of my skin. If I were a Black woman living in my neighborhood every day would be a Russian roulette of interactions; will today be the day I meet an officer who has multiple complaints of force that have gone unaddressed? While this committee cannot end the institution of racism in one fell swoop, it can pass a law that empowers citizens to use the tools

already available to them. The Maryland Public Information Act (MPIA) is a tool that is currently blunted because police disciplinary records are considered private and can't be released to the public. However, if officers' complaints against them for job-related misconduct are accessible through the MPIA, then citizens can ask legitimate questions about public employees who have the power to kill people.

On behalf of JUFJ, I respectfully urge you to do the work that you can now and issue a favorable report on HB 120/SB 178.