

**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 Committee members,

My name is Rev. Marguerite Morris and I live in Odenton, Maryland. I'm formally submitting my written testimony in support of HB 139 on Use of Force.

I am the founder of For Kathy's Sake, Community Actively Seeking Transparency (C.A.S.T.), and the mother of a deceased young woman named Katherine Sarah Morris. I have been in an eight year legal battle with police calling for greater transparency and accountability in matters related to her death. While I support all five of the ACLU's policing priorities, this testimony is provided in support of HB 139 – Use of Force.

As you know, Maryland does not have statutory limits on use of force, and the Supreme Court cases fail to adequately protect the lives and safety of Maryland residents. Instead of merely codifying *Graham* and *Garner* into state law, we must elevate the "objectively reasonable" standard to prohibit officers from using force unless it is **necessary** as a last resort, under the totality of the circumstances, after the officer has exhausted de-escalation and other reasonable alternatives. Although there are other necessary components to a robust use of force statute, failing to change the legal standard will maintain the status quo and let officers remain unaccountable for the harm they cause.

We must stop continuing to empower abusers to abuse. Police, policing themselves continue to give rise to conflicts of interest that have become a barrier to oversight in my own county. We as a Nation must rise up and do better. I charge you that as this country continues to cry out for justice for the unjust killing, or beating, or knee necking of our children, that you rise to the occasion and allow this bill to go forward and be enacted into law.

Now is the time for a statewide use of force standard that holds officers accountable when they use unlawful force, and ensures that officers will do everything they need to do in order to preserve human life.

As an impacted voter and community leader, I urge a favorable vote on HB 139.

Thank you,

**The Mother of Katherine Sarah Morris,
Marguerite Morris and the Friends of "For Kathy's Sake"**