

February 9, 2021

Louise Weissman
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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB120/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: Louise Weissman

My name is Louise Weissman. I am a resident of Greenbelt, in District 22. I am writing this testimony in support of HB120/SB178 - Anton's Law. Specifically, I call upon you to make revisions to the Maryland Public Information Act that conform to the Jewish call for Tzedek (Justice) and Tikkun Olam (Repair of the World).

In Judaism, the Mishnah is the original oral tradition of Jewish law, and it forms the first part of the Talmud, the central text of Rabbinic Judaism and the primary source of Jewish religious law and theology. Jewish tradition teaches us that G-d created humanity from one person so that none can say that their rights are greater than another's. It also teaches us that destroying one life is akin to destroying the entire world. Police violence has destroyed entire worlds of individuals and their families, particularly those who are Black and Brown. The current law does not support law enforcement accountability and transparency and this must stop.

The Maryland Public Information Act (MPIA) prevents the public from finding out if an officer has a record of misconduct. It's a disturbing gap as victims, their families, and the public are prohibited from seeing disciplinary files of the officers. Those directly impacted deserve to know. And, if there isn't an investigation, they need to know why. The public should be assured a level-playing field with departments and the officer(s) involved. It should not matter if the act resulted in death, permanent injury, or simply a black eye. Without access to information related to misconduct, communities will never build trust with law enforcement. Victims and families will not find closure or heal.

The police officer who killed Anton Black had a record of misconduct which did not carry over from his previous job in Delaware. That was and still is relevant to the case. Mr. Black's death was the result of Officer Webster's excessive use-of-force, and he had nearly 30 prior use-of-force complaints. His disciplinary files from Delaware should have been shared with the

Greensboro Department. The Greensboro Department should have proactively asked for the files as part of the hiring process. He never should have been hired, but his misconduct while employed in Maryland should also have been public.

Passage of Anton's Law will serve as a deterrent that will help reduce law enforcement violence. It will give a degree of hope that justice will be served for survivors of police misconduct. Trust will never be built between police and communities, especially those who are Black and Brown, without its passage. "**Equal Justice Under Law**" is inscribed on the front of the U.S. Supreme Court Building in Washington, D.C. Those words and their meaning need to be embraced by the State of Maryland, our counties and municipalities so justice can be brought for Anton Black, his family, and others. **I respectfully urge a favorable report on HB120/SB178.**