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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT (WITH AMENDMENTS) OF Bill SB627, Law Enforcement Officers' Bill of Rights - Repeal and Procedures for Discipline

Mar 23, 2021

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

FROM: Chris Apple

I am Chris Apple, I live in Columbia in District 13. This testimony is in support of Bill SB627 (with amendments.)

Both chambers of the General Assembly have agreed on the need to repeal the Law Enforcement Officers' Bill of Rights. However, through various amendments to SB627, many of the problematic provisions of LEOBR will survive its repeal.

A meaningful repeal of the LEOBR has to include meaningful civilian participation over the discipline of law enforcement, which SB627, as amended, would not do. Instead, as currently amended, SB627 would only provide civilian participation in an internal police procedure. Adding two civilians to a three-person hearing board will not bring about the real justice that Marylanders desperately need. SB627, as amended, also keeps intact the hearing board structure that disincentivizes police chiefs from disciplining police officers.

Real reform can only happen when the community has the opportunity to have real power over the discipline process of the police officers that are paid to protect and serve them. I urge the committee to add language to SB627 allowing localities to establish their own civilian disciplinary boards, with broad powers of oversight, adjudication, and punishment. Additionally, I strongly urge the committee to remove the amendments offered by the FOP, which create an overly-complicated hearing process that offending officers may use to escape discipline.