

Favorable Testimony

HB0227 – Courts – Improperly Summoning a Police Officer – Civil Liability

Chairman Luke Clippinger and honorable members of the Judiciary Committee, I am pleased and grateful for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 0227. This Bill is also being heard in the Senate SB0363 by Senator Cory McCray. This Bill proposes authorizing citizens to pursue civil lawsuits, up to \$10,000, against those who misuse calling 911 to summon a police officer for improper reasoning's. Those reasoning's including: the intent to (1) infringe on the person's constitutional rights; (2) unlawfully discriminate against the person; (3) cause the person to feel harassed, humiliated, or embarrassed or be expelled from a place the person is lawfully entitled to be; or (4) damage the person's reputation or standing within the community or financial, economic, consumer, or business prospects or interests.

The Bill, if passed into law, would discourage discriminatory and unsafe summoning's of the police. Tensions between civilians and police departments are at an all-time high in 2021. Allowing people to continually summon police officers for ordinary activities creates an unsafe environment for everyone involved. Historically, improper summoning's of the police have been utilized specifically against marginalized groups and Black communities. Trends on social media, including “#LivingWhileBlack”, reveal how prevalent racially motivated police calls are. News reports showcase that 911 has been called on African-Americans at alarming rates for ordinary tasks in life. Such as, mowing the wrong lawn, redeeming an expired coupon and not waving while leaving an AirBNB. Many of these calls include pleading for police intervention. This highlights a major issue: that a citizen has the ability to weaponize the State just to supervise the behavior of minorities. That becomes especially alarming in context of the racial disparities in police use of force which exist. This makes people of color more likely to encounter violence or harassment.

Additionally, exposing innocent citizens to heightened interaction with law enforcement not only poses real physical threats, but increased emotional trauma as well. Police officers respond to calls ready for the worst possible scenario, and sending this resource into non-threatening areas creates danger. Those who had the officer summoned on them must now deal with mortal fear as they hope the police understand the situation. The Maryland Legislative Body has an obligation to prevent this behavior to ensure a more just, equal and safe State.

Lastly, unnecessary police calls siphon resources and time away from the ability of the police department to pursue more pressing issues. When police are called for completely non-threatening issues, it results in less officers being able to respond to real, critical emergencies. Those who abuse this system should face consequences.