

February 9, 2021

Laura Atwood
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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: Laura Atwood

My name is Laura Atwood, and I live in Silver Spring, in District 20. I am submitting this testimony as an individual, and in support of HB120/SB178, Anton's Law.

I'm motivated by values and beliefs related to my experiences working in healthcare: that every person has deep, intrinsic value; that entities must try but cannot sufficiently police themselves due to inherent collegial loyalty as well as self-interest; and that dominant-culture organizations (regardless of self-perceived good intentions) manifest systemic racism and other biases that must be explicitly acknowledged and addressed.

The Maryland Public Information Act (MPIA) exists for an excellent reason; as the Washington Post now cheerily reminds us, "Democracy Dies in Darkness." While policing has its own structure and history, it exists in the context of a (fragile) democracy, and we need the vital safeguards of transparency and accountability. Police policies and practice ultimately seem to suggest that some individuals' value is negligible, relative to the career interests of police officers and the whole institution as it now stands.

I remember early in my career hearing about how in an earlier era, experienced surgeons would advise their nervous young colleagues: "You're entitled to one clean kill," meaning their work is inherently risky and they shouldn't be paralyzed by fear. Accompanying that was the counterpart: That mental carve-out is horrifying and is no longer true. (By the way, I'm a physical therapist and never heard such advice.)

Imagine if you couldn't even look up whether your future surgeon had any malpractice suits or disciplinary history. (By the way, you can and should--and also look up hospital information. And then you can apply critical thinking to whatever you discover.)

I believe that relying on self-policing is just unrealistic. There is an inherent conflict regarding loyalties to co-workers and loyalties to members of the public. I'm sympathetic to the plight of officers who see wrongdoing by the same co-workers who have saved their lives, or could; then add in notable self-interest if the co-worker has any level of dirt on that officer, plus self-interest of needing collegial working relationships to survive professionally (what happens to "snitches"?). Individuals and organizations have to keep relentless focus on dedication to the public above all; but there also has to be transparency to the outside world.

Racism and other types of bias are well-documented in every sphere of life, including policing--with deadly consequences. Allowing institutional secrecy is, de facto, accepting deaths disproportionately of Black and other vulnerable Marylanders.

I therefore respectfully urge a favorable report for HB120/SB178.