

TESTIMONY in Favor of HB120
Public Information Act - Personnel Records - Investigations of Law Enforcement Officers
(Anton's Law)

TO: Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Atterbeary, Members of the House Judiciary Committee
FROM: Iman Freeman on behalf of Baltimore Action Legal Team

My name is Iman Freeman and I am the Executive Director of Baltimore Action Legal Team (BALT). I submit this testimony in favor of House Bill 120.

The tremendous powers given to the police create a special responsibility to the public and the expectation of public monitoring. Transparency spreads accountability. That is why the public should have a right to determine for itself whether its law enforcement officials are applying the law fairly, even-handedly, and in a manner free from corruption. This has proven especially necessary with continual findings of violence and corruption in the Baltimore Police Department, and the failure of the agency to adequately address and investigate police misconduct.

BALT has made Public Information Act requests for public records from the Baltimore Police Department (BPD) over the past year and a half. After following up our requests twelve times over three months and being ignored, we had to file two cases for BPD Public Records. BPD sent fees inflated by over one-million dollars. BPD has also told us their internal investigations are of no benefit to the community and we do not have the proper expertise to know what to do with them. BPD even argues its disclosable investigatory files are exempt because they are stored with personnel files. This bill would disallow the cavalier games in which BPD engages citizens and advocacy organizations like BALT.

BALT has been in a Public Information Act process for over a year and we are still in Court. BPD sits in comfort ignoring the PIA, the PIA needs more teeth. This bill would go a long way in doing just that.

I urge a favorable report on HB120 from this committee.