

Testimony for the House Judiciary Committee

February 9, 2021

HB 139 –Law Enforcement Officers --Use of Force

FAVORABLE

To Chairman Clippinger, Vice Chair Atterbeary, and Committee members,

Hi, my name is Josette Blocker, I'm a constituent of district 23A and the aunt of Demonte Ward Blake.

As you know, Maryland does not have statutory limits on use of force, and the Supreme Court cases fail to adequately protect the lives and safety of Maryland residents. Instead of merely codifying Graham and Garner into state law, we must elevate the “objectively reasonable” standard to prohibit officers from using force unless it is necessary as a last resort, under the totality of the circumstances, after the officer has exhausted de-escalation and other reasonable alternatives. Although there are other necessary components to a robust use of force statute, failing to change the legal standard will maintain the status quo and let officers remain unaccountable for the harm they cause.

I'm urging this delegation and more specifically my 23A legislators, to support a use of force bill that the Maryland Coalition of Justice and Police accountability will be supporting this session. There were nearly **7,000 use of force complaints filed in this county alone in just the last 3-4 years and 99.6% of those complaints were "justified"**. That is insane!!! Officers should only be able to use lethal force only as a last resort after first exhausting reasonable alternatives, and only when it is necessary to protect officers or the public from death or serious injury. That is not currently the standard and as a result my nephew is paralyzed due to officers using unnecessary force. History is currently being written and I hope you all will be on the right side of this legislation in addition to the other 3 demands our coalition is advocating for.

Now is the time for a statewide use of force standard that holds officers accountable when they use unlawful force, and ensures that officers will do everything they need to do in order to preserve human life. I urge a favorable vote on HB 139.

Attentively,
Josette Blocker