

Dear Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

I am a resident of District 21 and have lived most of my 70 years in Maryland. I am testifying **in support of House Bill 120**.

House Bill 120 will reform the Maryland Public Information Act to allow details of the investigations of police misconduct to be disclosed. I request that you commit to reforming the MPIA because police accountability on a local level is impossible without it.

Currently, police misconduct investigations are considered "personnel records" and thus are not available for request under the Public Information Act. Passage of this policy will change this definition, resulting in an increase in police accountability, by ensuring victims and the media can get the details of how an investigation of complaints of police misconduct was handled. Additionally, it is imperative this legislation includes both sustained and unsustained cases, so citizens can get a full picture of an officer's history.

Other police departments also need access to accurate information when they are hiring. How can we prevent "bad apples" from moving from one department to the other if their misconduct is not able to be disclosed? The public is tired of paying out millions in taxpayers' money in court settlements over police misconduct. Between 2010 to 2019 that was over \$36 million dollars in Baltimore City alone. Certainly there are better uses for those funds, but this will continue unless we reform the MPIA.

Police need community oversight. Secrecy undermines community trust in police, at a time when police departments should be mending and improving their relationships with the communities they are sworn to protect. If police departments are investigating officer misconduct thoroughly, there should be nothing to hide.

Maryland ranks among the least transparent states with regard to police misconduct complaints. Twenty-nine other states make disclosure of complaint files more accessible to the public.

It is for these reasons that I am encouraging you to vote in **support of House Bill 120** to reform the Maryland Public Information Act.

I appreciate your time, service, and consideration. Thank you for your leadership and willingness to make the bold changes that meet this moment!

Sincerely,
Linda K. Girdner
941 Fall Ridge Way
Gambrills, MD 21054

Sources:

Zusha Elinson & Dan Frosch, *Cost of Police-Misconduct Cases Soars in Big U.S. Cities*, Wall Street Journal (July 15, 2015),

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/cost-of-police-misconduct-cases-soars-in-big-u-s-cities-1437013834>.

Mark Reutter, *The price of Baltimore police misconduct – \$24.5 million and rising*, Balt. Brew (Sept. 18, 2019), <https://www.baltimorebrew.com/2019/09/18/the-price-of-baltimore-police-misconduct-24-5-million-and-rising/>.