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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HBI 20/SBI 78

**Public Information Act – Personnel Records – Investigations of Law Enforcement
Officers (Anton’s Law)**

TO: Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Atterbeary, members of the Judiciary Committee

FROM: Ioana Stoica

My name is Ioana Stoica and I have been a Maryland resident for most of my life since immigrating to the United States at the age of 11. I have resided in District 21 for the past 5 years. I am writing as a concerned citizen, as a founding member of the Bend the Arc Moral Minyan, and also as a member of Oseh Shalom Synagogue in Laurel, MD. This testimony is in support of HBI 20/SBI 78, Anton’s Law.

For policing to truly foster public safety, good community relations are essential, and transparency is critical in building the trust that is a foundation for these relationships. Without this trust, community members are far less likely to cooperate with police in their investigations, not to mention they may actively fear and avoid police. Undoubtedly, the job of police officers is a challenging and demanding one, and most individuals who go into this profession do so because they want to keep their communities safe. So it is a shame when police misconduct is hidden from the public, because this breeds mistrust of the police force in general, including of officers who are trying to do good work and who are leading by example.

Transparency through public access to police misconduct records would not hurt police – quite the opposite. It would strengthen their legitimacy by holding police accountable and showing that nobody is above the law. Furthermore, if police disciplinary records were public, it would incentivize chiefs and commissioners to address officers with a high number of complaints or incidents of misconduct, because not doing so would be a professional liability. Also critically important, such a law that would make records of investigations into police conduct public would bring at least a small measure of closure to families of victims of police violence or misconduct. Imagine losing a child to violence of any kind, and not being able to find out all the details of what occurred, or to receive an explanation. For the state to compound such loss in such a violating way is unconscionable.

I am an immigrant from a formerly communist country, a place in which the police acted with impunity as an arm of the oppressive totalitarian state. Sometimes in reading the news today about the kinds of actions some police forces in the United States engage in, I have flashbacks to the sort of corruption that was the norm back in my country of origin: individuals dying in police custody in unexplained ways, police hiding documents from the public, officers not being held accountable for actions that would send regular civilians to prison, discrimination against people of color or people without monetary means, and more.

However, I am hopeful, because in the United States we also have mechanisms in place that can be used to challenge this type of corruption that simply were not available to the public in the Romania of my youth. For example, here we have democratically elected bodies like the Maryland General Assembly who have the power to bring meaningful change to policing in our state by passing bills such as Anton's Law. So please, consider doing so, for our communities, for the families of victims, and to strengthen our institutions. **I respectfully urge a favorable report for HBI 20/SBI 78.**