TESTIMONY OFFERED RELATING TO MARYLAND STATE HOUSE BILL 1023
RELATING TO COLLECTION OF DATA RELATED TO
PUBLIC SAFETY, CRIMINAL JUSTICE, CORRECTIONS AND JUVENILE SERVICES

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Honorable members of the Appropriations Committee, I respectfully offer this testimony as you consider the current bill, HB1023, on the collection of information related to public safety, criminal justice, corrections and juvenile services.

My name is LaTrina Antoine. I am the Editor-in-Chief of Baltimore Witness, a nonprofit organization that uses shoe-leather reporting and data science to track every homicide and non-fatal shooting case currently under adjudication in the Baltimore City Circuit Court.

Baltimore City is in crisis. In 2021, there were 339 homicides and 488 non-fatal shootings. There were also approximately 156 investigations with 79 arrests for homicide, and 111 known suspects arrested for non-fatal shootings. Of those arrested only 137 cases made it to adjudication, 17 of these cases were nolle prossed, approximately 82 cases received a conviction, 7 defendants were released on bail, and 310 plea offers were rejected.

Compounding the growing public mistrust of official efforts to stop the violence is the city's chronic lack of transparency in criminal justice and the woeful state of data collection and information in the city. The poor state of public information is reflected by efforts in this legislative session calling for greater transparency from the judiciary, pretrial services, and the prosecutor's office.

But, as the current appropriations bill moves forward, we urge the committee to consider factors that are needed to ensure true transparency:

1. Legislative Regulation
2. Data Gathering Systems
3. Government Agency Cooperation
4. Validation

It is vital to address these four areas if there is to be true transparency and accountability.

While there is much that could be said on the first three items we will focus our testimony on item four: validation.

As evidenced by the recent data dump from Baltimore's SAO, even when official data is provided, there remains a credibility issue. And while Baltimore Witness has no view on State's Attorney Mosby's performance, we offer an observation:

● Based on our independent data, the SAO's data is accurate but misleading.

For example, last fall the SAO claimed convictions on 18 homicide charges.The implication is that 18 murderers were taken off the streets. However, there were 7 people convicted of those 18 charges. The SAO also claims a 97% conviction rate, without accounting for all the cases the office dismissed that were immediately expunged under previous legislation designed to protect those not charged.

Our point is not to suggest the SAO, or other prosecutors, need policing but rather to urge the committee to ensure independent data validation.

As an example of what we mean, last week we sent a spreadsheet to members of the judiciary committee with data on homicide and non-fatal shooting cases in the city. The goal of the data is simply to provide statistics that validate or refute official information. Such outside data provides insurance against organizational bias.

To that end, we respectfully request the committee include in this bill (HB 1023), funding for external validation to ensure the integrity of official data.