

February 16, 2022

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THINK JEWISHLY. ACT LOCALLY.

**TESTIMONY ON SB441/HB991- POSITION: FAVORABLE**

**Baltimore City – Civilian Review Board**

**TO:** Chair Smith, Vice Chair Moon, and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee

**FROM:** Toby Ditz, on behalf of Jews United for Justice (JUFJ)

My name is Toby Ditz and I have lived in Baltimore City in District 40 for thirty-eight years. This testimony is on behalf of Jews United for Justice in **support of SB441/HB991, Baltimore City – Civilian Review Board**. JUFJ organizes more than 6,000 Jewish Marylanders and allies in support of local and state campaigns for social, racial, and economic justice, and we have been working with our coalition partners for **more than seven years on police reform**.

Last year, the General Assembly passed sweeping police reform legislation, including mandating that each county create a Police Accountability Board (PAB) with powers to review police misconduct cases. The intent was to provide a modicum of community oversight, but Baltimore already has a Civilian Review Board (CRB) created by the General Assembly in 1999. SB441 would authorize the City's CRB to acquire all the powers of the new Police Accountability Board – to become, in effect, the City's PAB.

This bill, then, eliminates the potential overlaps and contradictions between the reforms of 2021 and the older state statute that created Baltimore's Civilian Review Board. It does so by consolidating civilian oversight in a *single* entity backed by a budget sufficient to ensure meaningful oversight and adequate staffing, including independent counsel. To let both bodies stand would be to disperse and weaken oversight. In short, SB441 allows for smoother local implementation of last year's mandate.

SB441 also accords with the broader spirit of your statutory reforms. These reforms established statewide baseline standards for achieving greater police accountability: guardrails for local jurisdictions in a post-LEOBR era. But the intent of last year's police reform legislation was that each jurisdiction would adapt and improve upon this statewide framework, and SB441 allows Baltimore to do exactly this. Local reformers, especially in the majority Black districts that have the most to gain from police reform, had been calling for greater police accountability well before the Freddie Gray uprising and the Gun Trace Task Force scandal, and they have placed great emphasis on the need for a genuinely independent oversight board in order to

repair the broken trust between the Baltimore Police Department and Baltimore's Black residents.

Our Civilian Review Board is a work in progress, to be sure. But it already embodies innovations well adapted to our City and the wishes of its residents, including independent powers of investigation in misconduct cases and membership rules that draw community members from each BPD precinct. Adding to it the full powers of a Police Accountability Board and ensuring its autonomy through adequate financing and a professional staff will bring it even closer to the model of robust accountability that Baltimoreans want and deserve.

So let's finish what we started with last year's police reforms by passing this important follow-up legislation. **On behalf of JUFJ, I respectfully urge a favorable report on SB441.**