



# HARFORD COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

COURAGE HONOR INTEGRITY

**Senate Bill 864 - Oppose**

## Public Safety – Police Officers – Emergency Termination

### Letter of opposition to the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

March 1, 2022

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee, I am pleased to submit my written testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 864.

Many good men and women make the decision to enter a career as a law enforcement officer and swear an oath to uphold the laws and to protect the public. They complete a six-month academy followed by additional field training in order to gain the experience and knowledge to serve in the policing profession. The vast majority provide their service with honor and integrity and these men and women deserve the same rights to Due Process as any other American citizen.

Senate Bill 864 takes away an officer's or deputy's right to Due Process and gives a Chief or Sheriff the ability to terminate for a variety of reasons which would include just because a video of an incident or arrest did not look good. This is concerning in a society built around the premise of "Innocent until Proven Guilty" and no doubt would also serve to diminish the ability of an individual charged with a crime to receive a fair and impartial trial.

Last year my Office received a 20 second video of a deputy's interaction with a citizen. The video clearly did not tell the whole story and provided an edited account of an incident that occurred, and the actions the deputy took. Members of the public who viewed only this video "that did not look good" called on me as Sheriff to terminate this deputy immediately.

As part of the thorough internal investigation into this matter, we reviewed the deputy's body camera footage, in car camera footage and the account and statement from a second deputy on scene. It was clear that the deputy took the appropriate actions and the



individual accusing the deputy of wrongdoing later, as part of his plea, wrote an apology letter to the deputy, withdrew his complaint, and accepted a period of community service.

Under this legislation, Chiefs and Sheriffs would have the ability to make a knee jerk decision after receiving pressure from the public or elected officials to act without a full and complete investigation. Again, not only is this extremely concerning, it is against the most basic premise of our entire criminal justice system - Due Process.

In a time when we are considering putting individuals on Police Accountability Boards that were once convicted of a felony and allowing for the termination of police officers before all the facts of an incident are compiled or a full investigation takes place - truly puts us in a state where we are putting the rights of criminals or biased individuals ahead of those men and woman that are sworn to protect us and put their lives on the line each day doing an incredibly difficult job to keep us safe.

As Sheriff of Harford County, I have no problem terminating employees who do not live up to our high standards, or cops who have questionable integrity; I have separated many during my two terms in Office as the elected Sheriff. However, until the facts of an incident are presented, and it is clear that a deputy acted outside the bounds of the law and their sworn oath, they, like everyone else deserve to be afforded Due Process.

I ask for an unfavorable report on Senate Bill 864.