

Dear Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee,

This testimony is being submitted by Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore, a group of individuals working to move white folks as part of a multi-racial movement for equity and racial justice in Baltimore City. We are also working in collaboration with the Campaign for Justice Safety and Jobs. I am a resident of **the City of Baltimore and I have been a member of Baltimore's Civilian Review since May, 2017. I am testifying in support of Senate Bill 441.**

Senate Bill 441 will authorize Baltimore City's existing Civilian Review Board to function as the local Police Accountability Board required by the Maryland Police Accountability Act of 2021.

For reference, the passage of the Maryland Police Accountability Act included mandates for establishing jurisdictional Police Accountability Boards (PABs) in each county and Baltimore City. Intended to provide a measure of community oversight, the tasks assigned to PABs include: (1) appointing civilian members for the administrative charging committee and internal police trial boards; (2) receiving police misconduct complaints from the public; (3) reviewing disciplinary outcomes from charging committees; (4) holding quarterly meetings with law enforcement agencies; and (5) reporting on disciplinary trends and recommendations to improve police accountability.

The intended functions of the PABs are largely duplicative of those of Baltimore City's existing Civilian Review Board (CRB), which was established by the General Assembly in 1999. Senate Bill 441 seeks to keep existing CRB functions intact, while expanding the board's jurisdiction to include all forms of misconduct (rather than a subset), providing additional opportunities for the CRB to influence internal disciplinary processes, specifically allowing it to function as the PAB for Baltimore City, and allocating increased funding to ensure that the CRB has the resources required to effectively take on misconduct cases and to secure independent legal counsel. **The matter of legal counsel has been a bone of contention during my tenure on the CRB. We do not want to be in a position that requires the CRB to depend on the same legal apparatus that is responsible for advising the Baltimore Police Department.**

Empowering the City's Civilian Review Board to function as its Police Accountability Board is the key to achieving maximum police accountability for Baltimore City. It will allow us to consolidate community oversight, while at the same time building on the longstanding expertise and infrastructure of the CRB.

The need for an effective and adequately-resourced police oversight body is made abundantly clear by the episodes of excessive force and false arrest that continue despite public outcry and uprisings, by the senseless killings of Freddie Gray and Tyrone West, by the unchecked multiyear exploits of the Gun Trace Task Force, and by the harassment and indignities faced everyday by Baltimore residents in their interactions with law enforcement. According to an ACLU report released in 2021, the period of 2015 through 2019 saw over 13,000 police misconduct complaints filed against 1,800 officers in Baltimore City. For scale, in late 2017, the total number of patrol officers was just over 800. Unsurprisingly, police violence and misconduct disproportionately impact Black and Brown Baltimoreans and their families, and despite the sheer number of complaints against officers, only a fraction of these complaints are sustained. In addition to these human costs, continued police misconduct represents a direct and significant financial cost to the city; as the period from 2015 through 2020 saw Baltimore spend over \$18 million in settlements related to officer misconduct and harm.

These facts show the need for a robust Civilian Review Board, which has the resources and jurisdiction to effectively hold law enforcement accountable to the public. Failure to consolidate oversight power in the CRB would needlessly dilute independent oversight. It is for these reasons that I am encouraging you to **vote in support of Senate Bill 441.**

**Sincerely,
Melvin R. Currie
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