



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Testimony of Senator Jill P. Carter
In Favor of SB441 - Baltimore City - Civilian Review Board -
Before the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
On February 16, 2022.**

Chairman Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Committee:

Senate Bill 441 alters the powers and duties of the Baltimore City Civilian Review Board, allowing the Board to function as a police accountability board as envisioned in House Bill 670 of 2021 (the Maryland Police Accountability Act of 2021 - Police Discipline and Law Enforcement Programs and Procedures). Currently, the Board's powers and resources are limited in a way that prevents meaningful community oversight. Senate Bill 441 seeks to remedy this problem.

For decades, police misconduct has plagued communities throughout Baltimore City. Only after the death of Freddie Gray at the hands of the Baltimore Police Department, and subsequent community unrest, were problems within the force investigated. These investigations revealed a pattern of constitutional violations, including excessive force and racially biased arrests. The investigation into Baltimore's Gun Task Force in 2017 revealed even more misconduct in the form of racketeering, robbery, extortion, and fraud.

Following these revelations, reforms including a federal consent decree were implemented in Baltimore City. In 2021, the General Assembly took further steps to increase police accountability throughout the state. However, reform efforts still have not vested the Board, and thus the community, with the power it desperately needs to be effective.

The allocations within Senate Bill 441 build on House Bill 670, passed in the 2021 session, to enable full functionality of the Civilian Review Board, giving Baltimore's communities needed and deserved oversight. The Board would have the investigatory and disciplinary power to respond to every community allegation of police misconduct. The bill will not, to be clear, grant full disciplinary power to the Board, nor will it remove investigatory or disciplinary powers from the Baltimore Police Department.

This idea is neither exotic nor unprecedented. All across the country, states and jurisdictions have been empowering their law enforcement oversight boards to bring more accountability to how communities are policed. For example, the City of Chicago, with its long history of police abuse and corruption, recently revamped its decrepit and ineffectual civilian oversight entity and provided it with the resources and the power it needed to better hold officers accountable. And right now, Minnesota, still dealing with the fallout from the death of George Floyd, is currently considering legislation that will authorize local jurisdictions to establish civilian police oversight councils with new and expanded powers to make findings of fact and impose discipline on officers.

We can no longer allow unruly officers and dysfunctional departments to perpetuate systemic abuses of vulnerable community members. Allocation of resources and powers to a community controlled Civilian Review Board adds a critical layer of protection for community members. The changes created through this bill allow Baltimore's honorable law enforcement officers to reclaim their reputation as community protectors. Community oversight through the Civilian Review Board and the provisions of this bill are a significant step in repairing the damaged relationship between the public and law enforcement entities.

For this reason, I urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 441.

Respectfully,

Jill P. Carter

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