



Maryland Municipal League
The Association of Maryland's Cities and Towns

TESTIMONY

March 1, 2022

Committee: House Judiciary

Bill: HB 1184 - Police Accountability Boards and Administrative Charging Committees - Municipal Corporations

Position: Support

Reason for Position:

The Maryland Municipal League supports House Bill 1184, which authorizes municipal governments to establish a police accountability board and administrative charging committee.

New police disciplinary framework was passed into law in 2021 and goes into effect July 1, 2022. As part of that framework, counties are mandated to establish a police accountability board which, among other tasks, appoints civilian members to charging committees and trials boards. These boards and their membership are created by the county legislative body and should reflect the diversity of the county. The new law also mandates counties to have a charging committee which is tasked with reviewing investigation materials collected in response to a complaint against an officer, determine if disciplinary action should be taken, and what that should be. The charging committee reviews complaints against officers from all police departments in the county, including municipal officers. The accountability board and county elected officials determine the membership of the charging committee.

There are several problems with this setup from the municipal perspective:

- 1) The complaint process has the likelihood of dragging out if a single charging committee is tasked with reviewing complaints against all officers from all departments in the county. Any significant delay hurts the complainant as well as the officer and the department.

- 2) Municipal input from residents and elected officials are lost in this process as it is completely run by the counties. It is at the discretion of the county whether to address any municipal feedback.
- 3) Municipal police departments operate completely independently from their county counterparts. The existing framework mandates county oversight over a municipal service in an awkward arrangement rarely seen in the State.

The authority granted to municipalities in this bill will allow for municipal governments, should they choose to exercise this authority, the ability to create an accountability board and charging committee in a fashion that reflects their community and its values, while also spreading the case load among more entities, thereby shortening response times. There are significant costs associated with establishing and administering these entities and municipal governments must weigh those costs with the benefits to determine if it is appropriate to create their own entities. Should a municipality elect not to use this new authority, they would be subject to the county created framework as is the case now.

The provisions in HB 1184 alleviate the concerns listed above while providing flexibility for municipal governments. For these reasons the League respectfully requests that this committee provide House Bill 1184 with a favorable report.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

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