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Appropriations Committee

*House Chair*  
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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**HB0991: Baltimore City - Civilian Review Board**

Bill Hearing: March 1st, 2022, 1:00pm, Judiciary Committee

Chairman Luke Clippinger, Vice Chair David Moon, and members of the committee,

For over fifty years, since the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, our citizens have been demanding non-federal policy changes regarding community control of education and law enforcement. As we continue to witness acts of police brutality, both across the nation and within our own state, we must recognize the need for active and able community oversight that can investigate and discipline officers who use unnecessary force or other abuses of power to violate the humanity of our citizens.

Within our own Baltimore Police Department (BPD), we have seen over 500 pages of documentation detailing evidence of the sobering criminal behavior of BPD's Gun Trace Task Force. This long standing corruption is not a secret. The ever-growing crime and police misconduct in Baltimore go hand-in-hand. While our nation works toward reform on the federal level, it is our duty as state legislators to ensure that those in positions of power within our own communities are held accountable for wrongdoings committed against our civilian constituents.

In 1999, efforts were made to establish a community oversight entity to perform these necessary investigations. Unfortunately, in its current form, the Civilian Review Board (CRB) has no real investigatory or disciplinary power. Even if the CRB did have this power, it entirely lacks the resources necessary to utilize it.

During the 2021 Maryland General Assembly legislative session, unprecedented policies were enacted, pushing our community toward effective accountability and reform. However, a number of concerns remain, as the committees formed by last year's HB0670 have significant overlap with the intended duties of the CRB. In order to address these concerns, the CRB must be enabled as an independent entity with strengthened investigatory and disciplinary power. This cannot be done without substantial improvement to the resources allotted to the CRB and the enablement of its authority. While this bill will not provide the CRB with full or absolute disciplinary power, it intends to serve as an effective step in reallocating power to the hands of our community. HB0670 goes into effect in July of 2022, allowing us to use this time to change the legislation in order to empower the CRB to fulfill its potential and create positive change.

Over the years, the criminality and dysfunction observed within the BPD has weakened the community's faith in local law enforcement. While not all members of BPD are responsible for the evident acts of corruption, the weight of the known criminal behavior reflects poorly on the credibility of the entire institution, unless the civilian community is provided with the authority to hold law enforcement accountable. This bill will prove to be a huge step in restoring the community's trust in the BPD and making Baltimore a safer place to live, learn, and work.

I urge you to vote favorably on HB991.

Sincerely,

Delegate Stephanie M. Smith