

SB758_SarahLewitus_FAV

March 1, 2023

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TESTIMONY ON SB758 - POSITION: FAVORABLE
Baltimore City - Control Over Powers of Police Commissioner

TO: Chairman Smith, Jr, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee

TO: Councilman Conway and members of the Public Safety and Government Operations Committee

FROM: Sarah Lewitus

My name is Sarah Lewitus. I am a resident of District 14. I am submitting this testimony in support of SB758, Baltimore City - Control Over Powers of Police Commissioner.

As a resident, an artist, and a first-time mother-to-be, I feel that it is essential that Baltimore City restore control of the Baltimore Police Department to Baltimore residents so that Baltimore residents can have a voice in the management of health and safety resources in our city.

BPD consistently fails in its mission to “provide for the safety and well-being of all,” as made clear by Baltimore city’s seven-year federal consent decree, because of police abuses. The current system is simply not working. It is time to listen to the people of Baltimore City, who voted overwhelmingly in favor of making the BPD a City agency once more (over 82% of Baltimoreans voted for Question H, the local control ballot measure, in the most recent election.)

As a resident in Baltimore City, I should be empowered by the city to have a democratic voice in the control of the Department that purports to be concerned with my safety and well-being.

As an artist, I am confident that the people of Baltimore City can be creative, bold, and brave in imagining how safety and well-being is handled in our city, in ways that we are not enabled to do now, without local control.

And as a first-time mother-to-be choosing to raise my child in Baltimore City, I am determined that my child should have the opportunity to grow up in a community that has a direct voice in how safety and well-being is carried out.

The federal consent decree mandated the formation of a Civilian Oversight Task Force to make recommendations to strengthen police accountability and police-community relations. In their 2018 report they state: "The BPD will never be fully accountable to its residents until full control of the department is returned to the city." They stress the importance of the City Council having legislative power and recommend that this change happen "with all deliberate speed." It is your duty to listen to the Civilian Oversight Task Force and listen to the people of Baltimore City.

We want the City Council, our local, elected legislators, to have legislative authority to make changes to BPD policy.

To fulfill the will of Baltimoreans, the Maryland General Assembly must immediately restore control of the BPD to Baltimore residents and you, our local, elected legislators. Further delay is unacceptable. **I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on SB758.**

Thank you for your time.

Respectfully,

Sarah Lewitus