

February 14, 2023

Heidi Rhodes  
Silver Spring, Maryland 20904



**TESTIMONY ON SB285 - POSITION: FAVORABLE**

**County Police Accountability Boards - Investigation of Complaints of Police Misconduct**

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

**FROM:** Heidi Rhodes, on behalf of Jews United for Justice

My name is Heidi Rhodes, and I am a resident of District 14, in Silver Spring. I am submitting this testimony in support of SB285, **County Police Accountability Boards - Investigation of Complaints of Police Misconduct**. JUFJ organizes 6,000 Jewish Marylanders and allies from across the state in support of social, racial, and economic justice campaigns.

The concept of *tzelem elohim* — the idea that all people are created in the Divine image and therefore are equally precious and worthy — is central to Judaism. It is so central that our sacred texts declare that destroying even one life is akin to destroying a whole world. Unfortunately, we know that in Maryland, lives are destroyed every day, especially Black and brown lives, by our system of policing. And despite historic police accountability reforms passed by the Maryland General Assembly two years ago, community oversight of the police needs to be strengthened.

When I joined the National Security Agency as an analyst in the early 1980s, one of the first things I learned was the all-important computer science phrase GIGO: garbage in, garbage out. This phrase means that we needed to make sure we had all available data before analyzing a situation, or our analysis would likely be flawed or even invalid. The same can be said for internal investigations into police misconduct; under the current law, police are not required to investigate every complaint that is filed, meaning that their assessments of their own misconduct can be grossly inaccurate. For instance, a 2016 Department of Justice (DOJ) investigation into the Baltimore Police Department (BPD) revealed that of the 1,382 allegations of excessive force that the BPD tracked the prior five years, only 31 (or 2.2%) were sustained. The creation of Police Accountability Boards (PABs), as mandated by the Maryland Police Accountability Act of 2021, was a step in the right direction toward independent, community-controlled oversight into police misconduct.

However, PABs cannot conduct their own independent investigations into officer misconduct. PABs lack independent investigatory and subpoena powers, meaning they can neither

appropriately assess complaints and their outcomes, nor issue subpoenas to draw accurate conclusions. This leaves them reliant on internal investigations done by the very police department they are supposed to be holding accountable. To adequately address police abuse and violence, we must pass SB285 to clarify that local jurisdictions have the authority to grant their Police Accountability Boards independent investigatory powers.

As I learned at the NSA, we need accurate data if we want an accurate analysis. We get better results when independent investigations are done and organizations don't police themselves. We will have greater community oversight of police if police aren't the only ones able to investigate their alleged misconduct.

On behalf of Jews United for Justice, I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on SB285.