

Testimony for the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

Tuesday, February 14th, 2023

SB 285 - County Police Accountability Boards – Investigation of Complaints of Police

Misconduct

FAVORABLE

Dear Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the committee,

My name is Mir Usman Ali. I am a Maryland resident, and an Assistant Professor of public policy at the University of Maryland Baltimore County. I am writing in support of SB 285. I am grateful for your leadership and the Committee's initial support of police accountability measures and the Maryland Police Accountability Act.

My research addresses questions of how public organizations and employees may address social inequities, with a focus on the impact of citizen oversight of police. In one published study which examined the impact of police accountability boards (PABs) in the US over a period of 35 years. I defined investigative PABs as those that (i) classify complaints, (ii) independently investigate complaints, (iii) recommend findings, (iv) recommend or impose discipline, (v) have paid full-time staff, and (vi) have a budget. I found that PABs with independent investigatory authority lead to a 6% reduction in racial disparity in police homicides citizens per year. PAB's which lack independent investigative authority were not found to have any impact on the above racial disparities.

In a second published study, I examined the impact of PABs on the violent crime rate and homicides of police officers in the line of duty. I found that Investigative PABs led to a 21.1% reduction in the violent crime rate and a 9% reduction in line-of-duty police homicides compared to the pre-period. This is likely because investigative PABs inspire confidence among members of the public, which in turn increase public confidence and trust in police. PABs which lack such authority were not found to have any impact on either the violent crime rate or homicides of police officers in the line of duty.

The provisions outlined in SB 285 play an essential role in our pursuit of meaningful, independent police accountability boards at the county level. However, in order for local PABs to follow through on the fundamental goals of the MPAA, the legislature must clarify that local bodies can give their PABs the power to conduct independent investigations into misconduct complaints.

The main function of Police Accountability Boards is to assess the quality of police discipline and issue reports and recommendations to improve police accountability. Without the ability to conduct their own separate and concurrent investigations into complaints, the people of Maryland must accept law enforcement investigations at face value, which diminishes their

agency in shaping how they are policed. Fundamentally, without investigatory and subpoena powers, PABs are largely hamstrung in their ability to fulfill their role.

For the foregoing reasons, I urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 285.

Appreciatively,

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