



Maryland Municipal League

The Association of Maryland's Cities and Towns

TESTIMONY

February 21, 2023

Committee: Senate Judicial Proceedings

Bill: SB 409 - Police Accountability Boards and Administrative Charging Committees -
Municipal Corporations

Position: Support

Reason for Position:

The Maryland Municipal League supports Senate Bill 409, which seeks to add the municipal perspective to the police disciplinary framework. Specifically, the bill authorizes municipal governments to establish a police accountability board (PAB) and administrative charging committee (ACC) to handle complaints against officers of that municipality.

As mandated by the law that went into effect July 1, 2022, each county is setting up their PAB and ACC to handle complaints against officers that operate in their county, including municipal officers. However, the roll out of the PABs and ACCs has been rocky and in many instances municipal input has either been ignored or not solicited at all. This is a problem for all 157 municipalities, and especially for the 89 with police departments.

Specifically, here are the problems this bill addresses:

- 1) The potential for case backlog is real, with only one PAB and ACC in each county to handle complaints against all officers. Prince George's County has 25 municipal police departments in addition to the county police department.
- 2) Municipal values and voices are lost in this process and are being ignored by the counties. The lack of meaningful municipal input is tangibly impacting the makeup of the PABs and ACCs.
- 3) Municipal police departments operate independently from their county counterparts, yet the existing framework mandates county oversight over this municipal service in an awkward arrangement rarely seen in the State. In at least five instances across the State, a municipal police agency has more officers than their county department, yet it is the county that has full control over the PAB/ACC process.

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- 4) Not all municipalities will exercise this new authority, but those that do will work under the same safeguards already in place for the counties.

The authority granted to municipalities in this bill will allow for municipal governments, should they choose to exercise this authority, the ability to create a PAB and ACC 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 PABs and ACCs.

The provisions in SB 409 alleviate the concerns listed above while providing flexibility for municipal governments. For these reasons the League respectfully requests that this committee provide Senate Bill 409 with a favorable report.

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