

SB0285_JoShifrin_FAV

Date of Hearing: February 14, 2023

Jo Shifrin

Bethesda, MD 20817

TESTIMONY ON SB0285 FAVORABLE

County Police Accountability Boards - Investigation of Complaints of Police Misconduct

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

FROM: Jo Shifrin

OPENING: My name is Jo Shifrin. I am a resident of District 16. I am submitting this testimony in support of SB0285, County Police Accountability Boards - Investigation of Complaints of Police Misconduct.

I live in Bethesda and I am a Jew. In Deuteronomy 16:20, the Torah commands *Tzedek Tzedek Tirdof*—Justice justice you shall pursue. Why is the word justice repeated? Simkha Bunim of Pczsha, a Hasidic rabbi, teaching in the early 19th century, said it means “Pursue justice **justly**.” Judaism is guided by stories that impart values. *Tzelem elohim* teaches that all people are created in the Divine image, with inherent and equal dignity and value. Unfortunately, in Maryland, Black and Brown lives are not treated equally by our system of policing.

Historic police reforms were passed by the General Assembly two years ago, repealing the Law Enforcement Officer Bill of Rights and replacing it with a new disciplinary framework that included the requirement that all counties and Baltimore City establish a Police Accountability Board (PAB) and an Administrative Charging Committee. The goal of these boards is to change police culture so that Black and Brown people are not disproportionately killed or brutalized by police.

Police Accountability Boards need to conduct independent investigations into officer misconduct in order to appropriately review internal police investigations, and for the community to trust the integrity of these investigations. PABs must be able to hire their own investigators to work independently of the local police departments. Investigators must be able to issue subpoenas and use other techniques to draw accurate conclusions. The bill passed two years ago authorized the implementation of PABs but did not explicitly allow local jurisdictions to provide their PABs with independent investigatory and subpoena powers. This bill will remedy that, and make it possible for communities of color to feel safer in interacting with the police. **I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on SB0285.**