

Bill#SB0285_Louise Weissman_Favorable
February 14, 2023
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Greenbelt, MD 20770

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: Louise Weissman

My name is Louise Weissman. I am a resident of District 22 in Greenbelt. I am submitting this testimony in support of SB285, County Police Accountability Boards - Investigation of Complaints of Police Misconduct.

I am a member of Oseh Shalom in Laurel, MD, and Jews United For Justice - MD. During the 2021 General Assembly session, the Maryland Police Accountability Act (SB670) passed mandating that all Maryland's counties and Baltimore City form oversight bodies called Police Accountability Boards (PABs). The purpose of these Boards was to provide independent, community-controlled oversight in reports about police misconduct prepared by Administrative Charging Committees (ACCs). Those reports were to include a review of outcomes of disciplinary matters to be considered as well as a report of trends and recommendations.

As a Jew, I was taught that destroying one life is akin to destroying a whole world, and yet, even with the passage of SB670 2-years ago, Maryland's system of policing continues to destroy lives every day, especially Black and brown, and despite historic police accountability reforms, community oversight of the police still needs to be strengthened. I care about the passage of this new bill, because I believe our state still needs to reduce unnecessary police interactions; we need to rethink policing; and we need to transform public safety. It will bolster the intent of SB670.

SB670 was a step in the right direction, but PABs lack independent investigatory and subpoena powers. They can neither appropriately assess complaints or their outcomes. They cannot issue subpoenas to draw accurate conclusions. This gap leaves them reliant on internal investigations carried out by the very police departments that need to be held accountable. As a result there is an inherent lack of accountability to victims and their families which is typically mistaken as a belief that the job is dangerous, so there is never unwarranted police action. It also creates an overzealous belief that the Blue Line of loyalty is impenetrable. This is a conflict of interest that needs to be corrected. Simply put, local jurisdictions need to have the ability to grant PABs the power to conduct their own independent investigations into officer misconduct.

The passage of this bill will fill in a gap that was left unfilled with the passage of SB670. Therefore, I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on SB285.