

Dear Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee,

I am a member of Showing Up for Racial Justice Annapolis and Anne Arundel County. I am a resident of District 23 in Bowie. I am testifying in support of Senate Bill SB0285.

The provisions outlined in SB0285 play an essential role in our pursuit of meaningful, independent police accountability boards at the county level. I am grateful for your leadership and the Committee's initial support of police accountability measures and the Maryland Police Accountability Act (MPAA) throughout the 2021 session. However, implementation of HB0670 throughout the past year has made it clear that legislation is needed to clarify the authority local governing bodies have to empower their Police Accountability Boards. 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 boards lack meaningful capacity to do so and must accept law enforcement investigations at face value. Fundamentally, without investigatory and subpoena powers, PABs are largely hamstrung in their ability to fulfill their role.

Anne Arundel County is especially in need of this legislation. The Anne Arundel County Council, along with the administration of Anne Arundel County Executive Stuart Pittman, repeatedly denied local police accountability activists what they had been asking for: that the Anne Arundel County PAB have independent investigative authority. The same is true in Prince George's County. As a result, members of our local PABs are able to read about police brutality and misconduct in the paper, but don't have the ability to initiate investigations about these newsworthy events. This means that many instances of police brutality and misconduct will never make it to a PAB or Administrative Charging Committee, as the victims of these crimes have many reasons why they may not feel comfortable using the specified reporting process.

Until local PABs are able to get independent investigative authority, the effectiveness of our Police Accountability Boards will be severely limited. It is for this reason that I am encouraging you to vote in support of SB0365.

I appreciate your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,
Lori Kronser
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