



Testimony for the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

Tuesday, February 14th, 2023

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

FAVORABLE

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

We write to you to express our uttermost support for Senate Bill 285 (SB285) on behalf of Peaceful Resistance in Southern Maryland (PRISM). We are a grassroots social justice organization comprised of life-long Maryland residents. We have worked for police reform in Calvert County since our inception in 2020 and we know firsthand how essential it is that our legislators in Annapolis push for a favorable report on Senate Bill 285 in its current posture.

We are 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, our work over the last year has made it very clear that additional legislation is necessary to solidify the authority local governing bodies have to empower their PABs. In order for 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.

Our organization faithfully sits through the PAB meetings (those that are open to the public, at least). We have watched as the local government has turned our PAB into political theatre. With the highest of hopes, we were crushed as we watched our newly elected Sheriff make jokes in the meeting about how



certain complaints would not be taken seriously or even considered. “We don’t want to know if officers are speeding”, he joked to the PAB members in a winter 2022 meeting. The problem is, the police and commissioners in Calvert have worked together to intentionally undercut the PABs authority and foster an environment where the PAB members are disempowered to fully execute their jobs. Not only should the public feel free to report any level of misconduct, they should feel confident that their reports will be taken seriously. Even if the sheriff doesn’t feel that speeding is a serious offense, it’s certain that the grieving parents who buried their children in 2021 due to a recklessly driving police officer would feel differently. It is certain that the residents who have been pulled over and harassed by police for speeding would feel differently. Furthermore, this isn’t *just* about speeding—this laissez-faire attitude will apply to any offense that isn’t deemed worthy of investigation. The point is, if we’re pushing for accountability—there must be true, genuine accountability—regardless the level of offense—we can do that by giving power to our PABs.

Genuine police accountability serves us all. Accountability has the potential to improve the relationship between the community and the police. Accountability will help our citizens regain trust in our police force. Accountability will help leadership within the police force identify their “bad apples” and strengthen their workforce by ensuring that each officer values the safety and comfort of the citizens and acts with honor and integrity. If passed in its current posture, SB285 has the power to truly improve the state of policing and enact meaningful change in Maryland. **For the foregoing reasons, we urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 285.**

Appreciatively,

Peaceful Resistance in Southern Maryland