



Senate Bill 285

County Police Accountability Boards – Investigations of Police Misconduct

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Judicial Proceedings Committee

Date: February 14, 2023

From: Sarah Sample

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** SB 285. This bill would authorize county governments to authorize its own police accountability board to investigate allegations of police misconduct.

The structure of police accountability boards as established by the police reform legislation of 2021 is intended to enhance public oversight of officer misconduct. This legislation would extend local government power to further enable this civilian body. Additionally, since the bill creates this ability only as an option for local governments rather than a mandate, it does not require any action from counties that feel their existing process is sufficient to uphold the intent of the original law.

Each Maryland county has worked, on a rapid timeline, to establish these boards. The process has not been without its challenges. There are still regulations requiring clarity and various nuances to the language that leave a variety of legal questions and complications open for interpretation. SB 285 recognizes the difficulties counties are currently facing in this space by simply authorizing a new tool for those localities to exercise at their discretion.

In just the first couple months of operation, the required annual reports reveal how different the volume and types of cases can be from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. Collaboration between the civilian-led boards, their local government, and local law enforcement is essential in this process. Together, these entities are a hyper-local community of stakeholders that all want the best for Maryland residents. Communities understand their own needs better than anyone through the commonalities they share as neighbors. Empowering this community collaborative to decide what is best and take the appropriate actions or inactions upholds the continuity of purpose that residents must be able to rely on from their leaders and each other.

The integrity of the civilian oversight process is paramount to fulfilling the intent of police reform that has been absolutely and devotedly undertaken by all local governments. The attempt to further enable counties in that process encourages and preserves a trust in local authorities that stands to restore the faith of the public. Accordingly, MACo urges a **FAVORABLE** report for SB 285.