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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Oral Testimony of Delegate Jazz Lewis
HB332–Public Safety – Law Enforcement – Body–Worn Cameras
(Body–Worn Camera Appropriation and Financing Act of 2023)
Before the Judiciary Committee

To Chair Clippinger, Vice-Chair Moon, and members of the Judiciary Committee:

I am here today to introduce House Bill 332, the Body Worn Camera Appropriation and Financing Act of 2023. This bill is a continuation of work from the Law Enforcement Body-Worn Camera Taskforce which I co-chaired, and which was charged by Speaker Jones, to establish cost-efficient ways to scale the use and acquisition of body-worn cameras. In light of what we have seen out of Memphis, and the murder of Tyre Nichols it is now more important than ever that we have these cameras across Maryland and build more transparency into our law enforcement. Because we can't have accountability without transparency.

HB332 will allow for state-wide negotiation of body camera contracts, acquisition of devices, and storage for BWC's, which will help eliminate the significant financial barriers that many law enforcement agencies encounter when attempting to implement a BWC program. This is a problem especially true for Maryland's smaller or mid-sized agencies. This approach will streamline the resources necessary for a successful BWC program and will offer a standardized state-wide system that reflects the needs of law enforcement and promises transparency while integrating those BWC programs that already exist in the state. All the while removing the most significant hurdles to implementing BWC programs across our state.

Not only does this bill help cover the cost of BWCs to ensure the successful 'roll-out' of BWC programs, but it will also provide increased accountability in law enforcement, provide transparency and police oversight, and most of all increase trust and strengthen police-civilian relationships. Current research shows that the benefits of police body cameras include reduced use of force, improved transparency, and increased corroborating evidence. Though they are not a catch-all solution to the issues we face when it comes to accountability and transparency, they are an essential item in our toolkit, and we need to use them.

The instances of police brutality that have been showcased on the news are not new, it has existed in Black and Brown communities for years. What we have seen most recently out of Memphis, shows how impactful body-worn camera footage can be. This is why it is pertinent that we not only require law enforcement agencies to wear body cameras but that we provide a way for these agencies actually be able to purchase them. This is what House Bill 332 will do.

When law enforcement agencies lack the funding and resources necessary to employ a successful BWC program, the communities served by that agency will have more of a decreased sense of trust in the agency due to the lack of transparency. Even if those agencies are required by law to have programs.

Without the presence of body cameras in communities, it is harder for law enforcement to be held accountable for its actions and ultimately it makes it harder for law enforcement to do its job. That is why we as a state need to create a standard means for agencies to acquire these crucial tools. The costs for body-worn cameras can fall between \$1,791 and \$3,788 per officer/camera and when you are an agency with a handful of officers, your budget may not be able to bear such a cost. That's why the state needs to step in and help these agencies cover the expense of these cameras they are mandated to have.

I want to thank those stakeholders who have been working with us for years on getting this bill done right and are continuing to work with us on friendly amendments which will be provided to the committee once we receive them from the amendment office.

But with this bill we ensure that the transparency brought by body-worn cameras can be present in every place in Maryland where law enforcement officers are. This is so that we can have more accountability and to help law enforcement do its job more effectively.

For these reasons, I urge a favorable vote on HB332