

March 7, 2023

HB853

Baltimore City - Control Over Powers of Police Commissioner

Hearing of the Judiciary Committee

Position: Favorable

My name is David Cramer – I was born in Baltimore and lived my entire adult life in the City, now in the 43rd Legislative District. I am speaking on behalf SURJ Baltimore – We are a local chapter of the national Showing Up for Racial Justice. Our 4,000-member list-serve covers Baltimore City and Baltimore and Howard counties. Two-thirds live in Baltimore City. We are a group of volunteers working to mobilize white folks as part of a multi-racial movement for equity and racial justice in Baltimore. We are working in coalition with the coalition, Campaign for Justice, Safety and Jobs on this bill.

Every relative, neighbor, friend, and the many I canvased door-to-door last October in support of Question H on the city ballot in November of last year; were surprised to know that Baltimore City doesn't control our own police department. When informed of that fact, all were in favor of local control of our police department.

Back in 2014 I was surprised to learn that our city government's efforts to require body worn cameras for our officers, had to go before the state legislature. It took the Freddie Gray incident in 2015, to finally secure those cameras.

I learned recently that our City Council required all our city departments to introduce trauma interventions except for one, the Baltimore Police Department, which still is not a real department of the city but an agency of the state.

Several years ago, I was in these very chambers making the same request for local control which resulted in legislation providing a referendum which passed overwhelmingly last November as Question H on Baltimore City's ballot.

Now that we passed the referendum, everyone is further surprised that we still don't have full control without a technical fix on the charter. Yet, we continue to use our tax dollars to fund the police department and pay for civil judgements and settlements.

SURJ fully supports HB853 that would remove language from Article 2, section 27 of the City Charter that forbids the city to interfere with the authority of the police commissioner; this is meant to remove the last obstacle to local control. Finally, and most importantly, HB853 specifies full local control of Baltimore City's Police Department by June 1st of this year. We hope you will act now to get us out of this no-man's land of who is in charge – the State Legislature or the Baltimore City Administration and City Council.

SURJ Baltimore urges a favorable vote of HB853.

David Cramer on behalf of SURJ Baltimore

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