



Councilman Mark Conway

Chair Public Safety and Government Operations Committee

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TO: Chair Luke Clippinger; Vice Chair David Moon; members of the Judiciary Committee

FROM: Mark Conway (District 4, Baltimore City Council; Chair, Public Safety and Government Operations Committee)

RE: HB 853 (Baltimore City – Control Over Powers of Police Commissioner)

POSITION: Support

I am writing today to offer my support for HB 853 (Baltimore City – Control Over Powers of Police Commissioner), which would fully return power over the Baltimore Police Department to Baltimore City. 160 years after the control of Baltimore’s police department was stripped from city government, our city’s officials — duly elected by the citizens of Baltimore — continue to lack legislative authority over our police department. The taxpayers of Baltimore deserve full local control of the police department they fund, and I hope the General Assembly will pass this bill expeditiously.

Baltimore stands alone in the state of Maryland and virtually alone in the country in lacking direct authority over its police department. In 2014, the city council attempted to pass an ordinance to require BPD officers to wear body-worn cameras. The ordinance was deemed unenforceable because of BPD’s status as a state agency. Just last year, we saw how complex the process for the first police redistricting process since the 1950s was made by the department’s status as a state agency. When only state officials possess the power to legislate over an city’s police force, the will of the voters and the ability of their local legislators to carry out their legislative and oversight duties like they would for any other city agency is severely diluted.

In 2021, state lawmakers approved legislation allowing the issue of local control to be sent to city voters as a proposed charter amendment. The Local Control Advisory Board was created later that year to begin drafting language for the ballot question and amendment. Voters overwhelmingly approved the ballot question, but the issue has now fallen into a state of limbo where BPD is a city agency, but Baltimore government officers and legislators remain precluded by state law from enacting new laws regarding the department.

It is my hope that we can steer Baltimore and its police department in the direction of positive change and reform through restoration of local control to the Baltimore Police Department. For all the reasons above, I urge a favorable report on HB 853 without amendments so full local control can be reestablished this year.

Sincerely,

Mark S. Conway, Jr.