



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

February 21, 2023

Testimony in SUPPORT of HB 518 - Police Accountability Boards and Administrative Charging Committees - Municipal Corporations

Summary: HB 518 builds on the police reform this committee passed in 2021 by enabling municipalities in Maryland to establish police accountability boards so that they can oversee the municipal police forces that serve their residents.

Overview: In 2021, this committee did groundbreaking work to create first-in-the-country legislation that allowed for the establishment of community-based Police Accountability Boards (PABs) that oversee misconduct allegations against police officers.

While Maryland's 23 counties and Baltimore City have been able to establish their own PABs, the municipalities that reside within counties—even the ones with their own police forces—do not have that power, leaving them to rely on the county boards for oversight.

There are 157 municipalities in Maryland, and 88 of them (56%) have their own municipal police force. In fact, several municipal police forces in fact have *more* police officers than the counties that encompass them:

- Cumberland (47) / Allegany County (35)
- Cambridge (41) / Dorchester County (40)
- Easton (45) / Talbot County (37)
- Ocean City (102) / Worcester County (50)

These disparities in numbers could cause the county PABs to become overwhelmed with both county and municipal cases, which may result in a delay in justice as they work to sort through reviews of not only their county police officers, but also the municipal police forces that work for municipalities within their counties.

Baltimore City's PAB, for example, began its work earlier this month and is already facing a [backlog of over 400 complaints](#). For large counties with large municipalities, these numbers could be similarly staggering, which means not only that officers who pose a risk to public safety stay on the force longer, but also that officers who could be exonerated could stay on desk duty for longer than they need to.

Furthermore, municipal residents are not guaranteed representation on their county PABs, meaning that no municipal residents could decide what happens to a municipal police officer accused of misconduct. Local oversight is one of the key goals of the police reform this committee passed in 2021, and ensuring that municipal PABs are separate from their county boards will help ensure this goal is met.

HB 518 uses the existing framework provided by the 2021 legislation to ensure that the municipal PABs operate in the same way as the county PABs.

Conclusion: HB 518 ensures that county Police Accountability Boards are not overburdened and that municipal residents are ensured representation in the oversight of the police officers who work in their city.

Thank you for your consideration and I ask for a favorable report on HB 518.