



BALTIMORE CITY COUNCIL
KRISTERFER BURNETT
8TH DISTRICT

Room 552, City Hall
100 N Holliday Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21202
Office (410) 396-4818 | Fax (410) 396-4828

Baltimore City Councilmember Kristerfer Burnett - District 8
House Bill 853 - Baltimore City - Control Over Powers of Police Commissioner
SUPPORT

Greetings Chair and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and express my **SUPPORT for HB853- Baltimore City - Control Over Powers of Police Commissioner, repealing a prohibition on certain Baltimore City ordinances or acts of certain municipal officials from conflicting, impeding, obstructing, hindering, or interfering with the powers of the Baltimore City Police Commissioner.** My name is Kristerfer Burnett and I am a member of the Baltimore City Council representing the 8th City Council District.

In November 2022, Baltimore residents overwhelmingly voted in favor of making the BPD a City agency once more. Over 132,000 Baltimore residents voted on Question H (the local control ballot measure), and the vast majority - over 82% - favored it. However, to restore local control and allow City Council to have legislative authority over the department, The Maryland General Assembly must remove a minor provision in the Baltimore City Charter that continues to prohibit Baltimore from having control over BPD.

Baltimore City is the only locality in Maryland with limited control over its own police department, and one of only two in our entire country. In the early 1860s, The Maryland General Assembly made the Baltimore Police Department (BPD) a state agency after a violent white nativist party gained political control of the city and engaged in acts of corruption through the department.

The federal consent decree mandated the formation of a Civilian Oversight Task Force to make recommendations to strengthen police accountability and police-community relations. In their 2018 report, they stated, "The BPD will never be fully accountable to its residents until full control of the department is returned to the city." They stress the importance of the City Council having legislative power and recommend that this change happen "with all deliberate speed." As the local representative in Baltimore City, my constituents frequently contact my office seeking assistance with police matters; however, more often than not, my hands are tied as I do not have the authority in taking action.

Issues associated with the lack of local control were first apparent to me in 2014, prior to my service on the Baltimore City Council, in which the City Council voted to establish a body-worn camera program - a national trend and best practice. This was vetoed by then-Mayor Rawlings-Black, partly due to the lack of legislative authority to enact such a program. More recently, this has hindered my efforts to expand transparency and build regulatory guardrails for the departments that use facial recognition surveillance technology. Unable to include the BPD - the Council was only able to legislate protections pertaining to private-sector surveillance.

I appreciate your consideration of my overwhelming **SUPPORT** for the HB853 - Baltimore City - Control Over Powers of Police Commissioner, repealing a prohibition on certain Baltimore City ordinances or acts of certain municipal officials from conflicting, impeding, obstructing, hindering, or interfering with the powers of the Baltimore City Police Commissioner.

If you need more information, please feel free to contact me via email at kristofer.burnett@baltimorecity.gov and I am happy to discuss it with you further. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kristerfer Burnett". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kristerfer Burnett
Councilmember - 8th District
Baltimore City Council