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The Maryland House of Delegates
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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Judiciary Committee

Thursday, March 9, 2023

House Bill 1045 Public Safety – Safe Neighborhoods Pilot Program

Dear esteemed colleagues,

I am here today to urge you to support House Bill 1045 Public Safety – Safe Neighborhoods Pilot Program which seeks to create the Safe Neighborhoods Program. This program is a groundbreaking initiative designed to enhance public safety and security throughout Maryland. This innovative program aims to empower local communities and organizations to collaborate with law enforcement in creating safer and more secure environments by offering a doorbell

Allow me to present a real scenario to underscore the importance of this proposed legislation. Recently, a mother from Prince Georges lost her 13- year old son while he was raking leaves in their front yard. He was shot and killed in front of his house where his mother, father and his little sister that looked up to him sleep every night. Had she installed a doorbell camera, it would have provided critical footage to aid investigators in finding the perpetrator and solving the crime. Additionally, if one of her neighbors also had a doorbell camera, perhaps they would have captured something that could have helped with the investigation. I hear a story such as this family's story and think about one of the many tragic incidents that happen in my district. On May 10th, 2022 60 bullets were fired from an assault rifle on North Rose Street in Baltimore. One young man died at 25 years old, two other individuals were critically injured, they were 27 years old. 60 shots is complete overkill and had the neighbors on that street had cameras the culprit may have gotten caught.

The Safe Neighborhoods Program seeks to address such vulnerabilities by identifying high-crime areas giving residents security systems with doorbell cameras for two years free of charge as a crime deterrence strategy. Furthermore, this program will provide residents with comprehensive training on how to monitor and use the cameras, as well as how to contact law enforcement and submit evidence gathered from the cameras.

Currently Baltimore City has a program called Citiwatch. This program allows residents to register their privately owned camera systems through the police department's system in order to get a rebate and submit their camera footage to police. A similar bill was just introduced in

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Prince George's County. However, not everyone can afford to buy a doorbell camera, especially in my community. For this reason, I am asking for 5 million dollars to fund the Safe Neighborhoods Pilot Program in order to take the financial burden off of the shoulders of those who want to live in a safer community.

Additionally, by 2025, the impact of the Safe Neighborhoods Program on crime rates, the number of crimes solved, resident sense of security, program participation, and cost-benefit analysis will be reported to the General Assembly. In Los Angeles, a comparison study¹ of two neighborhoods yielded a 50% reduction in burglaries where the cameras were installed. In addition, the program will be implemented with regulations that prioritize the privacy of residents² and prevent unauthorized access or breaches of collected data.

The proposed legislation on the Safe Neighborhoods Program represents a proactive approach to crime prevention and holds great promise for the people of Maryland. It is crucial to ensure that our communities feel secure, and this initiative will aid in that mission. I respectfully urge this committee to provide a favorable report on HB 1045.

Thank you for your time and attention to this vital matter.

¹ "Police say crime drops with video doorbells - USA Today." 29 Mar. 2017, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/tech/talkingtech/2017/03/29/crime-busting-video-doorbell-ring-expands-clones-undercut-price/99677840/>. Accessed 1 Mar. 2023.

² "Doorbell Camera Surveillance Networks: Community Collaboration" <https://cops.usdoj.gov/html/dispatch/05-2020/doorbell.html>. Accessed 1 Mar. 2023.



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Here is a list of ways these cameras will make our communities safer:

- Elderly or vulnerable individuals: Doorbell cameras can be particularly helpful for elderly or vulnerable individuals who may be targeted by scammers or burglars. The camera can provide them with a sense of security and enable them to see who is at their door before answering it, which can prevent them from becoming victims of home invasion or other crimes.
- Domestic violence victims: For individuals experiencing domestic violence, a doorbell camera can help document any harassment or abuse they are experiencing, which can be used as evidence in court. It can also help provide early warning of an abuser's arrival, allowing the victim to take necessary precautions to protect themselves and their children.
- Neighborhood watch programs: Doorbell cameras can be used as part of neighborhood watch programs, enabling residents to monitor and report suspicious activity in their community. This can help prevent crimes such as burglaries or break-ins.
- Business owners: Doorbell cameras can be useful for business owners who want to monitor who is coming in and out of their establishment. They can help prevent theft, vandalism, and other crimes that can occur on business property.
- Emergency situations: In the event of an emergency, such as a fire or medical emergency, a doorbell camera can help emergency responders quickly locate the residence and identify any potential hazards outside the property.
- Deterrence: The presence of a doorbell camera can deter potential criminals from attempting to commit a crime, as they are more likely to be caught on camera. This will help law enforcement solve crimes and prosecutors to secure convictions without mass incarceration tactics.
- Identifying perpetrators: If a crime does occur, the footage captured by the doorbell camera can be used to identify the perpetrator, which can aid in their prosecution.
- Early warning: Doorbell cameras can provide early warning of suspicious activity, allowing residents to take necessary precautions before a crime occurs.
- Monitoring children and pets: Doorbell cameras can be used to monitor children and pets, ensuring their safety while they are outside.
- Preventing package theft: With the rise of online shopping, package theft has become a common crime. A doorbell camera can help prevent package theft by alerting homeowners when a package is delivered and by capturing footage of anyone who attempts to steal it.
- Providing peace of mind: Doorbell cameras can provide peace of mind for individuals who have been victimized in the past or who live in areas with high crime rates. They can feel safer knowing that they have an extra layer of security at their front door.