

Dear Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

This testimony is being submitted by Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore, a group of individuals working to move white folks as part of a multi-racial movement for equity and racial justice in Baltimore City and Baltimore County. We are also working in collaboration with the Campaign for Justice, Safety and Jobs, and the Maryland Coalition for Justice and Police Accountability. My name is Sarah Johnson, and I am a resident of MD District 41 in Baltimore City. **I am testifying in opposition to HB975.**



Last year the voters of Baltimore City overwhelmingly voted in favor of amending the Baltimore City charter to let the city assume control over its own police force, which has been managed by the state for more than 160 years. The 2021 statute allowing the transfer of the police department to city control (SB786)¹ ordered the creation of a Local Control Advisory Board (LCAB) to draft the charter amendment that would be put to the vote by the city residents and to investigate what types of municipal control of the police department were available and advisable. The law specifically provided that if the charter amendment was passed in the 2022 general election, the transfer of control would take effect on January 1, 2023. For all intents and purposes, the city regained control of its police department on that date.

To allow the city to actual use its power to regulate the department, the state must amend one final piece of the city charter- section 2, article 27- by removing language forbidding the city from legislating on the police department. A bill was submitted by the Baltimore City Delegation to make these changes: HB853², which is also scheduled for hearing before this committee on March 7th. However, several city delegates have introduced an alternate version of the bill, HB975, which in addition to making this charter amendment, would delay the effectiveness of the amendment until October 1, 2024.

This is an inexcusable attempt to delay the transfer of local control. The LCAB has met numerous times, held community outreach sessions, and submitted an interim report. Chairperson Dana Moore expressed at the most recent meeting on February 15, 2023 that the LCAB has received sufficient information to write their final report. At a city council hearing on February 21, representatives of the mayor stated that they expect the LCAB to deliver its report in April. Yet HB975 attempts to extend the LCAB's work by delaying the due date for their final report to December 1, 2023. In combination with the provision that would delay implementation until October 2024- **two years** after voters said they wanted local control to return to the city, and **three and a half years** after the General Assembly passed enabling legislation- it is clear that the primary purpose of this bill is not to promote local control, but to delay it.

The LCAB is ready for this change. The Baltimore City Council is ready for this change. And most importantly, the citizens of Baltimore are ready for this change. Please do not add unnecessary delays to the process of transferring local control. **I urge you to vote against HB975.**

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,
Sarah Johnson
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Baltimore, MD 21210
Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore

¹ https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2021RS/Chapters_noln/CH_133_sb0786e.pdf

² <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2023RS/bills/hb/hb0853f.pdf>