



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 621
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee, February 21, 2024

The Silver Spring Justice Coalition (SSJC) is a coalition of community members, faith groups, and civil and human rights organizations from throughout Montgomery County committed to eliminating harm caused by police and empowering those communities most affected by policing. In furtherance of this goal, it is essential that we give local governing bodies the authority to give their Police Accountability Boards the power to issue subpoenas and conduct independent investigations into complaints of police misconduct.

SSJC was the lead community advocacy organization that worked with our County Council to pass the legislation that created our Police Accountability Board and our Administrative Charging Committee. One of our demands, supported by many in our community, was that our PAB must be able to investigate individual instances of police misconduct in order to effectively do its job as the civilian oversight body for policing in our County. However, we repeatedly heard from council members that they were unwilling to consider this request because the Maryland Police Accountability Act did not expressly give the PABs that authority.

This bill clarifies this important issue, removing any doubt that local governing bodies may, if they choose to, give their PABs independent investigatory and subpoena powers. **It is enabling legislation and nothing more.**

While some may argue that giving the PAB independent investigative powers is redundant and unnecessary, our community disagrees. We don't think the PAB should have to rely on the law enforcement agency's investigation alone, even with the ACC's ability to request additional information. This concern has only grown for us this year as we've seen that our PAB receives very little from the ACC about the LEA's investigation; our PAB's oversight of the investigative process has been limited to reviewing a final investigative report. It is simply not possible for a civilian body to assess the quality of the law enforcement agency's investigation, or to assess the quality of the policing under investigation, without the independent ability to conduct their own investigation; this degree of oversight is necessary to end the practice of police policing themselves and to improve policing overall.

For these reasons we urge you to issue a favorable report.

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