

Testimony in SUPPORT of SB 621

**County Police Accountability Boards - Investigation of
Complaints of Police Misconduct**

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

February 21, 2024

Dear Honorable Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is John Spillane and I live in Hyattsville. I am testifying in support of SB 621. I think we'd all agree that public safety in our community is only as good as the trust we have in our police. In Prince George's County, where I live, trust in the police is fraught. This distrust is fueled by prevailing public opinion, based on years of experience, that our police department does not sufficiently hold officers accountable for misconduct.

According to the Graham Report released in 2021, the Prince George's County Police Department routinely failed to adequately respond to internal and external complaints of racial harassment, discrimination, and misuse of force.

Independent investigation of police misconduct is critical to meaningful accountability. That's why many people in our county welcomed the creation of the Police Accountability Board last year. But it's not enough.

This bill would give the PABs the ability to conduct independent investigations. That would provide the PABs a greater likelihood that investigations will be meaningful and that the public will trust their outcomes.

Despite strong community support, research, and documented best practices showing that independent investigatory powers are critical to community oversight, no PABs in Maryland have this authority now. Currently, PABs and Administrative Charging Committees are relying solely on internal police investigations when conducting reviews and deciding whether or not to charge an officer.

For Police Accountability Boards to truly act as independent and active oversight bodies, these powers must be awarded to PABs around the state. This bill clarifies that local governing bodies have the power to allow their PABs to issue subpoenas, interview witnesses, and employ other investigative techniques necessary to draw accurate conclusions about incidents, and to investigate claims prior the ACC making a decision.

For people to trust the integrity of investigations into police misconduct complaints, PABs must be able to conduct investigations of their own to provide accurate assessments of complaints and their outcomes. Only then will we have true public safety for all.

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