

Written Testimony in Support of HB0836
Submitted by Nicole Chang
Non-Voting Member, Civilian Review Board
On Behalf of the Baltimore City Branch NAACP, NAACP Maryland State Conference

To the Honorable Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

My name is Nicole Chang, and I serve as the Vice President of the Baltimore City Branch NAACP, the Criminal Justice Chair for the NAACP Maryland State Conference, and a non-voting member of the Baltimore Civilian Review Board. I submit this testimony on behalf of the Baltimore City Branch NAACP and the NAACP Maryland State Conference in strong support of HB0836.

We write in strong support of HB0836, which seeks to clarify the authority of Police Accountability Boards (PAB) by allowing them to exercise independent investigatory and subpoena powers.

The passage of the Maryland Police Accountability Act in 2021 was a significant step toward improving community oversight of police misconduct. However, the current law lacks clarity, leaving local jurisdictions hesitant to grant investigatory powers to PABs. Without these essential tools, PABs are forced to rely solely on internal police investigations, severely limiting their ability to function as true oversight bodies. The common sense that what the community wants and deserves isn't an accountability process that relies entirely on an investigation conducted by other officers. We must have the ability for PABs to conduct impartial, thorough, and unbiased investigations.

Maryland's history of police misconduct underscores the urgent need for independent investigations. The 2016 U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) investigation into the Baltimore Police Department (BPD) found that BPD routinely discouraged complaints, failed to investigate misconduct adequately, and rarely held officers accountable. Of the 1,382 excessive force allegations reviewed between 2010 and 2015, only 2.2% were sustained. The DOJ also determined that BPD's internal complaint process was deeply flawed, often failing to meet even its own policies and national law enforcement standards.

Furthermore, a 2021 report on the Prince George's County Police Department revealed systemic failures in responding to racial harassment, discrimination, and excessive force complaints. These findings are not isolated incidents—they reflect broader patterns across Maryland where law enforcement agencies have failed to police themselves effectively.

The need for independent oversight is even more urgent in Baltimore City, where the Civilian Review Board (CRB) is being sunsetted and is no longer taking new cases. The CRB previously played a critical role in reviewing and investigating complaints of excessive force, abusive language, and other forms of misconduct. Its dissolution leaves a dangerous gap in police accountability, making the passage of HB0836 all the more necessary. Without an independent body to investigate misconduct, complaints will continue to be handled exclusively by internal police investigators—undermining public trust and failing to provide true accountability.

Experience has shown that people are more likely to come forward and provide honest testimony when speaking with an independent investigator rather than a police officer investigating their own colleagues. This reality further reinforces why PABs must have independent investigatory and subpoena powers. Without these tools, community members will continue to view oversight mechanisms as ineffective, and the cycle of distrust between law enforcement and the public will persist.

The Baltimore City Branch NAACP believes that HB0836 is a necessary step toward ensuring that PABs can fulfill their intended role. By explicitly authorizing local jurisdictions to grant PABs independent investigatory

and subpoena powers, this bill strengthens civilian oversight and promotes transparency in police misconduct investigations.

For these reasons, we strongly urge the committee to support and advance HB0836. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Nicole Chang

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