

Testimony for HOUSE BILL 139

To: House Judiciary Committee

From: Jesmond O. Riggins, Esq., Member, Police Accountability Board of Baltimore City; Member, Administrative Charging Committee of Baltimore City

Re: House Bill 139 – Public Safety – Police Accountability – Deadline for Completion of Investigation

Position: **Support with Amendments**

Date: February 25, 2025

Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Moon, and Members of the Committee,

I submit this testimony in support of House Bill 139, which seeks to establish a **clear, enforceable** deadline for law enforcement agencies to complete and forward administrative misconduct investigations to their respective Administrative Charging Committees (ACCs). This bill is necessary because **state law does not currently impose a deadline for these investigations**, leading to **inconsistent timelines, delayed or denied accountability, and diminished public trust**.

Why This Bill Is Necessary

Without a statutory timeframe, law enforcement agencies set their own schedules, resulting in:

- *Uneven investigative timelines*, with similar cases handled at different speeds across jurisdictions.
- *Delays in accountability*, allowing officers under investigation to remain on duty or on paid leave indefinitely.
- *Obstructed oversight*, as prolonged investigations leave little to no time for ACCs to review and adjudicate cases before statutory deadlines expire.
- *Uncertainty for complainants, officers, and oversight bodies*, weakening public confidence in the process.

HB139 establishes a **statewide standard**, ensuring investigations move forward in a **timely and consistent** manner. However, **amendments are needed** to enhance the bill's effectiveness.

Key Issues & Proposed Amendments

1. **Unclear Deadline** – The bill currently states that investigations must be completed within nine months, but measuring in months rather than days creates ambiguity, making it harder to benchmark, track compliance, and enforce accountability.
 - **Amendment 1:** Measure deadlines in **days, not months** for clarity.
2. **Excessive Timeframe** – Nine months is too long and risks delaying critical cases.
 - **Amendment 2:** Reduce the deadline to **180 days (six months)**, which is a reasonable amount of time for a law enforcement agency, even the large ones, to complete investigations. Extensions could be granted in **exceptional** cases, rather than allowing routine delays.
3. **Incomplete Start Time Definition** – The bill only applies when a public complaint is filed, excluding cases where misconduct is identified internally (e.g., body-worn camera audits or officer reports).
 - **Amendment 3:** Start investigations from **either the complaint filing date or the date an official of the law enforcement agency becomes aware of misconduct, whichever occurs first.**

Conclusion: Favorable Report with Amendments

HB139 is a necessary step to ensure statewide consistency and transparency in police misconduct investigations. However, **it must be strengthened to prevent unnecessary delays that weaken oversight and public confidence.** I urge the committee to issue a **Favorable Report with Amendments** to create a more effective and accountable system.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Jesmond O. Riggins, Esq.

Member, Police Accountability Board of Baltimore City

Chair, Policy and Advice Committee, Police Accountability Board of Baltimore City

Member, Administrative Charging Committee of Baltimore City

Former Maryland Senate Chief of Staff (Policing & Police Accountability Legislation)

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