
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 255

No-Knock Warrants

Judiciary Committee

February 25, 2025

Social Work Advocates for Social Change strongly support HB 255, which will prohibit the utilization of no-knock warrants by law enforcement. No-knock warrants are a dangerous law enforcement practice that jeopardizes the safety of civilians and officers alike. Although intended to protect officers and preserve evidence, these surprise entries frequently result in tragic errors, including mistaken raids and violent confrontations. The confusion and fear provoked by sudden, unannounced entries often lead residents to believe their homes are being invaded, triggering instinctive self-defense responses with potentially fatal consequences. Additionally, the use of no-knock warrants disproportionately impacts marginalized communities, perpetuating racial disparities and eroding public trust in law enforcement.

No-knock entry is inherently dangerous for civilians and law enforcement alike.

Their use significantly heightens the risk of violent encounters, resulting in unnecessary trauma, injury, and death. While intended to protect officers and preserve evidence, these entries frequently lead to tragic errors, such as executing raids at incorrect addresses or targeting nonviolent offenders. Hernan Palma, a Montgomery County firefighter, had a no-knock warrant executed at his home in September 2019. Palma, fearing his home was being robbed, ran towards his 13-year-old daughter's room, where he was met with a rifle being pushed against his chest.¹ He was tackled and punched in the face before being put in handcuffs alongside his wife and daughter. Unfortunately, the Palma family's experience is not unique. Those subjected to a no-knock entry often assert that they feared their home was being invaded. The confusion and chaos of such encounters can provoke a self-defense response from residents, leading to potentially fatal confrontation.

The National Tactical Officers Association (NTOA) has advised against the use of no-knock warrants - recognizing the risk to both law enforcement and civilians. As

¹ Morse, D. (2021, May 6). Firefighter sues Montgomery County over no-knock warrant he says 'terrorized' his family. *The Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/public-safety/no-knock-warrant-lawsuit/2021/05/05/833b8e3a-adc9-11eb-acd3-24b44a57093a_story.html

recently as July 2023, a deputy in Ville Platte, Louisiana, was killed during the execution of a no-knock warrant. The family of the young man who shot him had recently moved into the residence after experiencing a robbery where they previously lived. Acting out of fear and instinct, he shot at police, who returned fire, ultimately killing a man and severely injuring a woman.² The risks and realities of no-knock warrants led the NTOA to issue a position statement advising against the continued use of no-knock warrants, citing the propensity for violence due to the potential for:

- The misidentification by the occupants of the police as intruders;
- The compression of space and time negatively affect[ing] the ability to correctly interpret situations and the environment for both the police and occupants;
- The misidentification of intent on the part of occupants and the police;
- Police creat[ing] an environment along with the suspect's intentional or unintentional actions requiring correct interpretation from both sides, which often does not occur, leading to an unfortunate tragedy.³

Following the implementation of the Maryland Police Accountability Act (MPAA), Maryland began collecting data on the execution of no-knock warrants. However, substantial discrepancies in data have been found in the 2022 SWAT Team and Search Warrant Report and the SWAT Team Deployments and No-Knock Warrants dashboard. *(See the attached report.) Discrepancies in data collection and reporting seriously diminish the effectiveness of the law. Without access to dependable and consistent reporting, any effort to increase transparency and accountability related to the execution of no-knock warrants and SWAT team deployments is moot.

Additionally, the information collected and disseminated is insufficient. No data is available relating to the primary offense of the warrant, important demographic information related to the subject of the warrant, and what resistance, if any, the execution of the warrant was met with. Collecting demographic data is imperative to law enforcement transparency, especially when considering the disparate impact aggressive police tactics have had on marginalized communities. While there is some reported data on whether an injury or death occurred as a result, none has been

² Ardrey, T. (2023, August 7). 'It was all out of fear': Family of Louisiana couple shot during drug search raises questions about the deadly raid that killed cop, says they were recent victims of robbery. *Atlanta Black Star*. Retrieved from <https://atlantablackstar.com/2023/08/07/family-of-louisiana-couple-shot-questions-raid/>

³ National Tactical Officers Association (NTOA). (2022, February 25). Position statement on No-knock warrant service. Retrieved from <https://ntoa.org/pdf/PositionStatement-No-KnockWarrantService.pdf>

collected regarding law enforcement's use of force in the execution of a warrant. This lack of comprehensive information undermines efforts to achieve accountability and justice.

No-knock warrants are a tool of racial disparity – in both the past and present. No-knock warrants were first introduced during the Nixon administration's "War on Drugs," a set of policies that intentionally targeted the anti-war left and Black Americans. Since that time, aggressive law enforcement practices, such as no-knock warrants, have proliferated, with particular implications for marginalized communities. A report published by the Office of Legislative Oversight for Montgomery County in September 2024 underscores this disparity. The report analyzed use-of-force incidents and the execution of no-knock warrants by the Montgomery County Department of Police (MCPD), revealing stark racial disparities. In 2023, Black civilians accounted for 977 incidents of police use-of-force, representing 57% of all such incidents in the county.⁴ Yet, Black residents comprise only 18% of Montgomery County's population.⁵ This data clearly illustrates the unequal treatment of people of color by law enforcement in the county, reflecting broader patterns of racial bias associated with no-knock warrant practices. Furthermore, the report provided valuable insight into who is subjected to no-knock warrants. While only nine no-knock warrants were executed by MCPD in 2023, 53 people were present at the homes being raided, of which only one person was white; the rest were either Black or Hispanic.⁶ It is likewise important to note that 14 people present during the raids were under the age of 18, with the youngest person being just two years old.⁷ **The limited data available in Maryland on the use of no-knock warrants shows clear racial disparities.**

⁴ Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO). (2024, September 17). *Implementation of the 2020 use of force and no-knock warrant law* (Report Number 2024-13). Montgomery County, Maryland.
https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OLO/Resources/Files/2024_reports/OLOReport2024-13.pdf

⁵U.S. Census Bureau. (2023). *QuickFacts: Montgomery County, Maryland*. U.S. Department of Commerce.
<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/montgomerycountymaryland/PST045223>

⁶ Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO). (2024, September 17). *Implementation of the 2020 use of force and no-knock warrant law* (Report Number 2024-13). Montgomery County, Maryland.
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⁷ Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO). (2024, September 17). *Implementation of the 2020 use of force and no-knock warrant law* (Report Number 2024-13). Montgomery County, Maryland.
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The inconsistencies in data reporting and the lack of comprehensive information undermine the transparency and accountability that the MPAA was intended to achieve. Moreover, the troubling racial disparities in the execution of no-knock warrants, as evidenced by the Montgomery County Police Department's data, reveal the disproportionate harm these practices inflict on marginalized communities. **The continued use of no-knock warrants perpetuates inequities and fosters fear rather than safety. Banning no-knock warrants is necessary for a more equitable and transparent justice system that prioritizes public safety without sacrificing civil rights.**

For these reasons, Social Work Advocates for Social Change urges a favorable report on HB255.

Social Work Advocates for Social Change is a coalition of MSW students at the University of Maryland School of Social Work that seeks to promote equity and justice through public policy, and to engage the communities impacted by public policy in the policymaking process.