

2/21/25

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**House Judiciary Committee  
HB0836 - Favorable with Amendments  
(County Police Accountability Boards - Complaints of Police Misconduct)**

**Dear Chair Clippinger, Vice-Chair Bartlett and Honorable Committee Members:**

I am a resident of Baltimore County, where in recent years our County police department led the entire state of Maryland in “officer related deaths”, including some high-profile, video-recorded incidents that resulted in no consequences for the offending officers. That prompted me to become deeply involved as a citizen-advocate in Annapolis and in my own community working for legislation that established independent, community-based Police Accountability Boards. PAB’s were intended to ensure that there would be local community oversight and transparency deployed to address and investigate complaints from individuals who experienced harassment, abuse or misconduct from local police officers. When Baltimore County established its PAB and it was “up-and-running”, I was very hopeful that we would have a system that worked.

However, several months ago I attended an open community meeting with one member of Baltimore County’s PAB and the County employee who serves as the PAB’s administrator to hear an update on the PAB’s work thus far. When we attendees were shown a spreadsheet of the number of complaints filed in each PAB member’s district, I asked how PAB members were informed when a complaint was filed in their own district and whether they were able to read the complaints to understand what their fellow community members were experiencing and reporting.

I and other attendees were shocked and disturbed to learn that local PAB members are limited to viewing merely the number of complaints filed online each month: They are prohibited from having any access to read the complaints as submitted, they are prevented from learning any details about the nature of the police misconduct that a complainant reported, and they are precluded from viewing any camera-worn video or other evidence. We were informed that withholding complaint files from PAB members was a matter of “protecting the privacy” of complainants and officers (however, we suggested that names of complainants and officers could be simply redacted). Ultimately, we realized the complainant - a human being - with a troubling encounter with a police became reduced to a single meaningless digit on a spreadsheet.

It seems to me that the system of processing complaints around officer abuse/misconduct in my home county was actually devised to bypass the Police Accountability Board’s oversight authority by withholding information contained in those complaint records from PAB members. Such an end-run to thwart the spirit and intent around the Maryland law establishing Police Accountability Boards should alarm every lawmaker serving on this committee.

Any person who files a complaint about a troubling interaction with police should have confidence that, in Maryland, that file will be opened and read by PAB members. They should also have confidence that their local PAB is able to thoroughly investigate their complaint, independently of the police department's own internal investigative process which is legally fenced-off from any outside scrutiny.

It has become abundantly clear that passing HB0836 is absolutely necessary to clarify and strengthen Maryland's law that established the right for local communities to establish Police Accountability Boards. Marylanders have demonstrated that they want meaningful oversight and transparency around their local police departments.

Especially when in Black and immigrant communities and vulnerable communities with high-crime rates and pervasive police presence, when complaints of officer misconduct are ignored and swept under the rug or when they turn to a PAB that simply does not have the ability to respond to complaints thoroughly, who can blame community members who become skeptical and reluctant to trust and work with police to improve overall public safety? It is thereby that the social contract is diminished. We can do so much better in Maryland in 2025!

I strongly urge you to support HB0836 with strengthening amendments.