



CAROLINE COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

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Sheriff Donald L. Baker

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House Bill 885

*Support for House Bill 885—Public Safety—Police Accountability—Investigation Records Related to
Unfounded and Exonerated Complaints*

Position: **FAV**

Date: **February 25, 2025**

To: **Judiciary**

I am writing to formally express my office’s strong endorsement of House Bill 885—Public Safety—Police Accountability—Investigation Records Related to Unfounded and Exonerated Complaints. This crucial legislation seeks to ensure that police officers are not unduly impacted by unfounded or unproven allegations throughout their careers. In close-knit communities such as Caroline County, law enforcement officers face significant hurdles in fostering and maintaining public trust, making it essential that frivolous complaints do not unjustly damage an officer’s reputation indefinitely.

While the principles of accountability and transparency in policing are vital, it is also important to recognize that law enforcement officers often operate in complex situations where complaints can arise, even when their actions align with legal and agency protocols. When an officer is exonerated or a complaint is determined to be unfounded, it is only fair that such records be removed from their personnel file after a reasonable period. The absence of this provision could lead to lasting and detrimental effects on the careers of law enforcement personnel in communities similar to ours, and throughout the State of Maryland, due to allegations that lack merit.

Furthermore, the recruitment and retention of law enforcement officers in rural areas, such as Caroline County, present ongoing challenges. The prospect of a false or unsubstantiated complaint remaining in an officer's personnel file diminishes the appeal of the profession, thereby discouraging individuals from remaining in this essential field. The passage of House Bill 885 would represent a balanced approach, ensuring that instances of misconduct are properly documented while recognizing that officers should not be subjected to the enduring repercussions of disproven accusations.

I appreciate the leadership demonstrated on this important issue and strongly urge support for House Bill 885 to promote fairness for those who serve and protect our communities.

Respectfully,

Sheriff Donald L. Baker Jr. #0141