

Friday, February 21, 2025



Showing Up for Racial Justice

Dear Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

I am submitting this testimony as a member of Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) Baltimore, a group of individuals working to mobilize white people in a multi-racial movement for equity and racial justice in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Howard County. We are also working in collaboration with the Campaign for Justice, Safety, and Jobs (CJSJ), which is composed of over 30 organizations from Baltimore to address and provide policy, economic and justice solutions. I am a resident of Baltimore City and District 41. I am testifying in **support of HB0122 - Police Accountability - Police Complainant.**

The Maryland Police Accountability Act of 2021 mandated a civilian-run Police Accountability Board, or PAB, for each police department across the state. PAB members receive public complaints about police misconduct, review outcomes after the department's Administrative Charging Committee (ACC) investigates disciplinary matters, examine overall trends and policies in how officers are disciplined, and draft annual written reports identifying trends and recommending policy changes. PABs are crucial to providing independent, adequate oversight and accountability for police departments statewide.

Passing HB0122 would strengthen the 2021 Maryland Police Accountability Act by allowing police officers, as well as members of the public, to file complaints with the PAB about any misconduct by police. Officers facing the difficult decision of how to respond to a colleague's misconduct would have the PAB as an additional external resource, rather than relying solely on internal investigative processes.

A police officer's job is difficult and stressful in the best of circumstances. In addition to the challenges inherent in enforcing the law, they may face distrust from the very communities they serve due to a common public perception that "all cops are bad" and that police

officers will always cover up other officers' misdeeds. Forcing police officers who have the integrity to hold other officers accountable to rely only on internal investigations maintains an understandable community mistrust of police departments, who can appear more invested in protecting themselves than seeking the truth and justice for all.

The devastating fact is that sometimes the departments officers work in are, indeed, corrupt. *Chasing Justice*, the American Civil Liberties Union's 2021 report on police corruption in Maryland, examined results from a 2020 survey of Baltimore Police Department officers conducted by the Commission to Restore Trust in Policing. The ACLU noted that participating officers' responses revealed that 9% reported observing fellow officers committing theft or overtime fraud, selling or using drugs, planting evidence, or engaging in other criminal misconduct. 35% of officer respondents agreed that it would be "easy for an officer who engages in criminal misconduct to go undetected," suggesting a deeply concerning lack of faith of rank-and-file officers in BPD oversight and leadership. (p. 27)

Additional details about police corruption and criminality in Maryland—including violent crimes and excessive use of force in the line of duty—are documented throughout the ACLU's report. Yet officers in Maryland or elsewhere who want to report police misconduct are hampered by their profession's unofficial but strongly enforced code of silence.

Police whistleblowers frequently face obstruction or retribution from fellow officers or from their supervisors, who may retaliate by "weaponiz[ing] internal affairs, pursuing minor rule infractions such as breaking the chain of command, in order to discredit whistleblowers and get rid of them." Fear of such retaliation can keep an officer silent about colleagues' misconduct, thus allowing police misconduct to continue and contributing to public distrust of police.

It is crucial that honorable, law-abiding officers—those who cannot turn a blind eye to criminality in their own workplace—have multiple avenues to file complaints about police misconduct. These avenues should include the civilian-run Police Accountability Boards as well as internal investigative bodies. Good police officers are pillars of our communities, and they deserve to have the same access to the PAB that other community members have. It is for these reasons that I am encouraging you to vote **in support of HB0122 - Police Accountability - Police Complainant**.

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,
Dr. Katherine Blaha
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