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Hello, thank you for the opportunity to testify on SB 0455.

My name is Evan Avnet, President of the Maryland Investigators and Security Association which is a association of licensed Maryland Investigation and Security agencies throughout the state. I am here today to advocate for a critical update to Maryland's laws governing special police officers (SPOs). I urge you to support legislation that would permit SPOs to work under the employ of licensed security agencies, rather than being tied exclusively to individual properties. This change would bring transformative benefits to our state, particularly in business locations, residential areas, and lower-income areas where safety and economic challenges often intersect.

Maryland's current framework for special police officers (SPOs)—private individuals granted limited police powers under state law—ties their authority directly to the property they serve. While this system has its merits, it is increasingly clear that amending the law to allow SPOs to work for security agencies, rather than being tethered exclusively to a specific property, would bring significant benefits to public safety, operational efficiency, and economic flexibility. This shift would modernize Maryland's approach to private security, aligning it with contemporary needs and fostering a more dynamic, responsive system.

Under the existing law, SPOs are commissioned to protect a particular property, such as a shopping center, hospital, or industrial site. This rigid structure limits their ability to respond to broader security demands. By contrast, allowing SPOs to work for security agencies would enable these trained officers to be deployed across multiple locations as needed. A security agency could assign SPOs to a retail complex one day and a corporate campus the next, optimizing their use based on real-time demand.

This flexibility would be a game-changer for businesses and property owners. Small enterprises, unable to afford full-time SPOs, could contract with an agency for part-time or as-needed coverage. Meanwhile, larger organizations could scale security up or down without the administrative burden of commissioning new officers for each site. The result is a more efficient allocation of resources that benefits both the public and private sectors.

It is important to remember that SPOs currently exist, the only change that is occurring is allowing licensed Maryland security agencies, who must have someone with five prior years law enforcement or investigative experience as a licensee, to employ special police officers. Nothing in the powers of the officers changes in that their powers still evaporate at the property line unless they are pursuing someone that committed a crime on the property that they are assigned to protect.

Security agencies, as centralized entities, are better positioned to invest in high-quality training and oversight than individual property owners. Eighty hours of standardized MPCTC training is currently required however, security agencies are able to provide additional training over and above that standard. Currently, SPOs' training in addition to the required eighty hours varies widely depending on the resources and priorities of the property they serve. A security agency, operating at scale, could standardize training programs, ensuring all SPOs meet rigorous benchmarks in areas like de-escalation, legal compliance, and emergency response. This also significantly would lighten the load on the public police by allowing the SPOs to respond to more nuisance, lower level issues.

Moreover, agencies could maintain accountability through consistent supervision and performance evaluations—something harder to achieve when SPOs are scattered across disparate properties with no unifying authority. This professionalization would elevate the overall quality of private security in Maryland, building public trust in SPOs as capable, well-prepared officers.

SPOs employed by security agencies could coordinate more effectively with local law enforcement, acting as a force multiplier in times of need. For example, during a large-scale event or a spike in crime, agencies could redeploy SPOs to hotspots, supplementing police efforts on client properties without the jurisdictional constraints of property-specific commissions.

This model has proven successful elsewhere. Many states currently have special police officers that work for security agencies, including the District of Columbia, where private security firms play a robust role. Officers can pivot to where they're needed most, creating a nimbler response to emerging threats. Maryland could follow suit, leveraging SPOs as a proactive layer of security rather than a static, property-bound resource.

The current system places a heavy burden on property owners, who must navigate the commissioning process and bear the full cost of employing SPOs and provide for supervision and oversight. Many properties do not have the expertise or personnel, such as a full time security director, to accomplish this. Shifting to an agency-based model would distribute these costs more equitably. Businesses could contract services on a subscription or per-hour basis, reducing overhead while still accessing trained personnel. This would be especially advantageous for small businesses, which often lack the budget for a dedicated security manager but still face risks like theft or vandalism.

For SPOs themselves, working for an agency could mean more stable employment. Rather than relying on a single property's budget, officers would benefit from the broader client base of an agency, potentially leading to better wages, benefits, and job security. This could attract higher-caliber candidates to the role, further strengthening the system.

Lower-income communities in Maryland face unique security challenges—higher rates of property crime, limited police resources, and businesses stretched thin by tight budgets. Under the current system, SPOs are commissioned to protect specific properties, a model that works for wealthier areas with large commercial complexes or affluent homeowners' associations. But in places like West Baltimore, East Side Annapolis, or rural pockets of the Eastern Shore, this structure leaves residents and small businesses underserved. Property owners in these areas often can't afford to hire full-time SPOs, and local police, while dedicated, are spread too thin to address every concern.

Allowing SPOs to work for security agencies would change that. Picture this: a security agency contracts with a cluster of small businesses—a corner store, a laundromat, a barber shop—in a lower-income neighborhood. Instead of each owner scraping together funds for their own officer, the agency deploys trained SPOs to patrol the area, deter crime, and respond to incidents across multiple sites. This shared-cost model makes professional security affordable, leveling the playing field for communities that deserve protection just as much as their wealthier counterparts.

The benefits go beyond affordability. In these neighborhoods, where trust in authority can be fragile, SPOs employed by agencies could build stronger community ties. Unlike traditional police, SPOs focus on prevention—de-escalating tensions, deterring loitering or vandalism, and fostering a visible presence that reassures residents. Agencies could train these officers in cultural competency and conflict resolution, tailoring their approach to the specific needs of lower-income areas. I've spoken with residents who say they'd feel safer seeing a familiar, well-trained officer patrolling their block, rather than waiting for an overstretched police response after a crime has already occurred.

Economically, this shift would be a lifeline. Small businesses in struggling areas often cite crime as a barrier to growth—customers stay away, and owners live in fear of break-ins. By providing accessible security through agencies, we'd help these entrepreneurs thrive, keeping money and jobs in the community. And for the SPOs themselves, many of whom come from these very neighborhoods, agency employment could mean stable work with better pay and training, offering a pathway out of economic hardship. Additionally, the addition of SPOs working for security agencies provides new jobs, a new income stream for the security and training agencies, and provides income to the State of Maryland in additional licensing and sales tax revenue.

Maryland's economy and population are growing, and with that growth comes increased demand for security. The current property-specific SPO model, rooted in a less dynamic era, struggles to keep pace. Allowing special police officers to work for security agencies would bring the state's laws into the 21st century, offering a scalable, professional, and cost-effective solution.

This change wouldn't just benefit property owners and SPOs—it would enhance safety and resilience across Maryland's communities. It's time for lawmakers to recognize the potential of this shift and amend the law to reflect the realities of today's world. The result would be a stronger, more responsive security ecosystem that serves everyone, from small business owners to everyday citizens.

In summery, currently the challenges of a special police officer being restricted to work directly for the property are:

1. The property owner is tasked with licensing the special police officer which requires an application to the state police, an administrative fee, and required training.
2. The property owner is required to provide the special police officer with certified MPCTC training of 80 hours and maintain their training accordingly in order to obtain and renew their licensing. Typically this employs the property owner to employ a certified MPCTC special police instructor which is costly. Additionally the property owner must maintain training records and have the knowledge to train the officer with the required training per MPCTC policy. Typically private properties such as HOA's, apartment complexes, etc have no knowledge of police training and/or how to certify persons with less lethal or firearms and cannot afford to keep a trainer on staff for this purpose.
3. Property owners are required to employ special police officers directly as employees and must cover them with payroll expenses and schedule them appropriately which is time consuming and costly.
4. Currently, if property owners hire a security guard agency, the security guards assigned to the property have no detention or arrest authority.

In allowing special police officers to be employed by a licensed security agency this would allow:

1. The agency to train, license, schedule, provide insurance, supervise and employ the special police officer
2. Decreasing the liability on the property
3. Decreasing the need for on duty public police to respond to nuisance incidents so that they can be available for more significant crimes in progress
4. Allow for a central collection of data point for MSP
5. Allow for better tracking of use of force incidents
6. Defray the expenses to the property owner of training, employment and taxes
7. Allow the agency to schedule the officers appropriately thereby eliminating the property need to do so
8. Provide clients an additional level of security that cannot be provided by security officers
9. Allow an additional revenue stream to the security industry
10. Allow for additional licensing revenue stream for the state

This isn't about replacing our police—it's about complementing them. In lower-income areas, where every resource counts, SPOs working for security agencies could act as a force multiplier, easing the burden on law enforcement while delivering targeted protection. I've seen the difference a visible security presence can make in my own [community/work/experience], and I believe this change could bring that hope to countless Marylanders.

I respectfully ask you to pass this legislation. It's a practical step to make our smaller business, residential locations, and lower-income communities safer, stronger, and more equitable. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Evan Avnet, President
Maryland Investigators and Security Association