

Tuesday, January 20, 2026



Showing Up for Racial Justice

Dear the Members of the Budget and Taxation Committee,

I am submitting this testimony as a member of Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) Baltimore, a group of Marylanders 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 CASA de Maryland, an immigration advocacy and assistance organization based in Maryland. I am testifying in **support of SB1 - Public Safety - Law Enforcement Officers - Prohibition on Face Coverings**.

In the State of Maryland, we expect the law enforcement officers who serve our communities to openly identify themselves as such when doing their jobs. Law enforcement agencies have policies requiring officers to wear uniforms or other identifying markers in most circumstances, and we even have a law - **Criminal Procedure Article 2-109** - which requires a police officer to identify him or herself by name, agency, and badge number when approaching a citizen for a traffic stop or other investigation.

Throughout 2025, we saw alarming and abundant incidents of federal law enforcement actions conducted by officers wearing street clothes and balaclavas or other face coverings, clearly obscuring their identities and the agencies under which they were operating. Simultaneously, incidents of police impersonation have been on the rise in Maryland and nationally. This is not a coincidence: without requiring law enforcement officials to clearly identify themselves, it becomes impossible to determine who is a legitimate law enforcement officer and criminals can more easily and plausibly claim to be police by simply putting on a mask. Even the FBI has recognized this danger, circulating a bulletin to law enforcement agencies in October 2025 that warned that criminals were taking

advantage of routine mask-wearing by law enforcement to disguise themselves as ICE agents.¹

Trust between law enforcement and the communities is crucial for law enforcement to be able to do its job. Failure to enforce clear identification of law enforcement and creating easy opportunities for criminals to impersonate law enforcement endangers the public, undermines the public's trust in actual law enforcement, and fosters a sense of fear in communities everywhere.

In addition to endangering civilians everywhere, this confusion makes routine law enforcement operations more dangerous. Initial contact between an officer and a civilian is often the most uncertain and dangerous moment in a law enforcement encounter. Ensuring that everyone is informed about what is happening and who is involved can help prevent rash and dangerous decisions.

SB1 would require the creation of a model masking policy banning the routine use of full face masks to conceal the identity of law enforcement officers. It would also require law enforcement agencies operating in Maryland to adopt that policy or its equivalent. Officers would still be permitted to wear necessary tactical and safety equipment, and full face masks could be authorized under specific, defined circumstances. Use of this policy would reinforce a clear distinction between officers conducting enforcement actions and criminals hiding their faces to masquerade as law enforcement, making everyone safer. It is for these reasons that I am encouraging you to vote **in support of SB1, Public Safety - Law Enforcement Officers - Prohibition on Face Coverings.**

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,
Dr. Katherine Blaha
Baltimore, MD
Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) Baltimore

¹ Cameron, Dell & Haskins, Caroline, "FBI warns of criminals posing as ICE, urges agents to ID themselves." WIRED Magazine, Nov. 4, 2025. <https://www.wired.com/story/fbi-warns-of-criminals-posing-as-ice-urges-agents-to-id-themselves/>