



TESTIMONY

COMMITTEE: Senate Judicial Proceedings

DATE: February 17, 2026

POSITION: Favorable with Amendments

BILL: SB 516

The Maryland Municipal League (MML) The Maryland Municipal League supports the intent of this legislation and appreciates the focus on officer safety. Ensuring that law enforcement officers are equipped with body armor that meets current National Institute of Justice (NIJ) ballistic resistance standards is a critical and appropriate public safety objective. Municipal police departments share the commitment to protecting the health and safety of their officers and the communities they serve.

The bill establishes clear requirements that law enforcement agencies issue compliant protective body armor to officers assigned to non-administrative duties, replace armor prior to expiration or manufacturer-recommended replacement dates, and maintain appropriate oversight and reporting. These expectations reflect best practices already followed by many municipal departments across the State.

However, the League respectfully requests amendments to address the enforcement structure tied to grant funding. As drafted, the bill requires reporting to the Maryland Police Training and Standards Commission if armor is not replaced within 31 days of expiration, followed by notification to the Governor's Office of Crime Prevention and Policy and potential withholding of grant funds. Repeated noncompliance may result in the loss of grant eligibility for the following fiscal year.

While accountability is important, withholding or suspending all grant funds may have unintended consequences, particularly for small municipal departments with limited administrative staff and constrained procurement timelines. Body armor is typically custom-fitted, and replacement may depend on manufacturer lead times, supply chain delays, or changes in an officer's size requiring refitting. These logistical realities can create short, unavoidable gaps despite good-faith compliance efforts.

The League therefore respectfully suggests amendments that provide reasonable flexibility for documented procurement delays or fitting-related issues beyond an agency's control; allow corrective action periods prior to grant suspension; and tailor funding consequences to the specific program at issue, rather than broadly withholding all grant funding. With these adjustments, the bill would maintain strong safety standards while recognizing operational realities faced by municipal law enforcement agencies, and the Maryland Municipal League would respectfully request a favorable report on Senate Bill 516.

For more information relating to this piece of testimony, please contact:

There are 88 municipal police departments and roughly 4,000 officers.

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