

Testimony on Senate Bill – **Favorable**  
**SB0001 - Public Safety - Law Enforcement Officers - Prohibition on Face Coverings**  
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee  
January 22, 2026

Dear Honorable Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Erin Hodge-Williams. I am a resident of Baltimore City and a homeowner in Garrett County, Maryland. I am writing in **strong support** of SB0001 – Public Safety – Law Enforcement Officers – Prohibition on Face Coverings. I am a **licensed clinical social worker with over 35 years of experience working in community-based settings and as a psychotherapist in private practice**. My professional expertise includes depression, anxiety, trauma—including vicarious trauma—and community-level trauma.

I write with deep concern about the psychological and public safety impacts of law enforcement officers wearing masks while engaging in enforcement actions, particularly when those actions involve aggression or escalate to violence. Mask-wearing affects both the individual wearing the mask and those subjected to or witnessing the encounter.

**First, decades of psychological research demonstrate that anonymity increases the likelihood of aggression and violence.** This phenomenon—often referred to as *deindividuation*—reduces accountability and increases the risk of excessive force. Research conducted in Northern Ireland during the conflict known as *the Troubles*, particularly in and around Belfast, found that individuals who concealed their identities during enforcement or paramilitary actions were significantly more likely to engage in violent behavior compared to those whose faces were visible. The masking of identity consistently correlated with increased aggression, reduced inhibition, and diminished personal responsibility.

**Second**, extensive clinical and public health research shows that exposure to aggressive or violent law enforcement activity—whether experienced directly, witnessed as a bystander, or encountered repeatedly through media—can lead to trauma-related symptoms. These include anxiety, hypervigilance, sleep disturbance, mistrust of authority, and impaired daily functioning. **Importantly, when the individual committing the aggressive act is masked, the traumatic impact is often intensified. A masked perpetrator signals danger, unpredictability, and lack of accountability, which significantly heightens fear responses. This harm extends not only to the direct target of the encounter, but also to bystanders and entire communities who witness or later view these events.** The role of social media further amplifies these effects. Masked officers appearing in these videos contribute to widespread fear, community distress, and erosion of public trust.

From both a clinical and public safety perspective, allowing law enforcement officers to conceal their identities during enforcement actions is harmful. Mask-wearing during aggressive encounters undermines accountability, increases the risk of violence, and exacerbates trauma for individuals and communities alike. When officers—particularly ICE agents—cannot be readily identified, the risk to mental health and public safety increases. For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to issue a **favorable report on SB0001 – Public Safety – Law Enforcement Officers – Prohibition on Face Coverings**.

Thank you for your consideration.



Respectfully,  
Erin Hodge-Williams, LCSW

