

Hearing Date: Thursday, 1/22 at 1:00 p.m.

Paul Holmes

Silver Spring, MD 20901

Testimony on SB 1 – Favorable

Public Safety – Law Enforcement Officers – Prohibition on Face Coverings

To: Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee

From: Paul Holmes

My name is Paul Holmes. I am a resident of District 19 and I am pleased to submit this testimony in support of Senate Bill 1 (SB 1), which prohibits law enforcement officers, including federal agents, from wearing face coverings—such as masks, gaiters, or balaclavas—while performing public duties in Maryland, with reasonable exceptions.

In a free and democratic society, law enforcement officers operating in public spaces must be identifiable. The use of masks, particularly by federal agencies, creates a "paramount" or "secret police" atmosphere that erodes trust, accountability, and safety. When officers are unidentifiable, it becomes impossible for citizens to verify their authority or hold them accountable for potential misconduct.

I have witnessed with concern the increased usage of masks by law enforcement, including Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents, during public arrests. These actions are often jarring to the public, foster fear, and can be mistaken for criminal impersonation of law enforcement.

SB 1 addresses these issues by:

- **Prioritizing Accountability:** Mandating that officers show their faces promotes transparency, ensuring that misconduct is not hidden behind tactical masks.
- **Increasing Trust:** When law enforcement acts in our communities, residents should know who is interacting with them, fostering a safer, more transparent environment.
- **Providing Necessary Exceptions:** The bill rightly allows for exceptions for undercover operations and necessary tactical gear in high-risk situations.

Allowing law enforcement to hide their identities in public directly undermines public trust. This bill ensures that policing remains open and accountable to the people of Maryland. For these reasons, **I respectfully urge a favorable report on SB 1 Public Safety – Law Enforcement Officers – Prohibition on Face Coverings.**

