

My name is Robert Oerter. I live in Hyattsville, MD, and I want to provide testimony in support of SB-1 and HB-0155 regarding the prohibition on masks for law enforcement officers.

Accountability is crucial for any law enforcement agency. Law enforcement officers have great power over citizens. If there are no restrictions, if there is no accountability, then the system is ripe for abuses. When abuses occur it can be difficult or impossible for them to be held accountable if they are masked.

Masks also create fear in the community. A law officer in uniform is intimidating, a law officer wearing a mask is even more so. Fear discourages cooperation with law enforcement.

Masks may even encourage law enforcement to violate their own codes and policies. We all know from experience that people who are very polite when standing in line will behave badly when in the anonymity of their car, and people who will express polite disagreement when talking face to face will sneer and curse in the anonymity of the internet. Anonymity breeds contempt.

The horrific events we have been witnessing in Minneapolis and other cities show that when there is no accountability, law enforcement officers may overstep the bounds of their duty to the endangerment of the community.

Masks make it all too easy for criminals to impersonate law enforcement. Someone can wear camouflage and pull on a mask, and they will be able to commit any crime without fear of being identified later. The fear and intimidation already mentioned will make this all the easier.

Please pass these bills to help keep our community safe.