



Testimony on Senate Bill 1 – Favorable
SB 1 – Transparency and Accountability in Law Enforcement

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

January 22, 2026

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

Advance Maryland supports the passage of SB 1, legislation that would prohibit law enforcement officers from wearing face coverings while performing their official duties, with limited and appropriate exceptions. SB 1 is about transparency, accountability, and public trust—foundational principles for effective and constitutional policing. At a time when public confidence in law enforcement is fragile, Maryland must ensure that those exercising state power do so openly and are clearly identifiable to the public they serve.

Allowing law enforcement officers to conceal their identities while carrying out arrests, searches, or other enforcement actions undermines accountability and creates fear in communities. When residents cannot see an officer's face or identify who is exercising authority over them, it becomes far more difficult to report misconduct, seek redress, or trust that actions are lawful. Anonymous enforcement erodes due process and weakens the legitimacy of law enforcement institutions.

These concerns are especially acute in the context of immigration enforcement. Across the country, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has increasingly relied on masked officers during arrests and raids—often conducted in neighborhoods, homes, and public spaces. These operations are frequently sudden, intimidating, and traumatic, particularly for children and families. The use of face coverings by armed officers carrying out civil immigration enforcement has fueled fear, confusion, and misinformation, while making it functionally impossible to distinguish legitimate law enforcement from impersonators or vigilantes.

Masked officers escalate encounters, creating a climate of fear that discourages people from reporting crimes, cooperating as witnesses, or seeking help in emergencies. This does not enhance public safety—it undermines it.

SB 1 helps ensure that Maryland does not normalize secretive or militarized policing practices that are inconsistent with democratic accountability. By requiring officers to be identifiable while performing their duties, this bill protects civil liberties, supports community trust, and reinforces the principle that government power must be exercised transparently.

Importantly, SB 1 does not prevent law enforcement from protecting officer safety in appropriate circumstances. Rather, it draws a necessary line between legitimate safety considerations and unnecessary anonymity that shields misconduct and intimidates the public.

Maryland has long been a leader in advancing sensible, values-driven public safety policies. SB 1 continues that tradition by affirming that transparency is not a threat to safety—it is essential to it.

For these reasons, Advance Maryland respectfully urges the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee to issue a favorable report on SB 1.