

Dear Members of the **Judicial Proceedings Committee**,

This testimony is being submitted by Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore, a group of individuals working to move white folks as part of a multi-racial movement for equity and racial justice in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Howard County. We are also working in collaboration with Out for Justice. I am a resident of District 46. I am a community association board member, workforce development civil servant, and volunteer who cares deeply about my Baltimore community. **I am testifying in support of HB336 Criminal Procedure – District Court Commissioners.**



Showing Up for Racial Justice

As the law currently stands, individuals may seek the arrest of fellow citizens by presenting allegations directly to district court commissioners. This process has had significant consequences for those accused, including job loss, financial hardship, damaged credit, and harm to their reputation in the community. In contrast, individuals who make false allegations rarely face consequences. The Baltimore Banner reported that in 2024, it found only five cases in which individuals were charged with perjury for making false statements to a district court commissioner. District court commissioners reportedly approve about 93% of applications submitted by both law enforcement and private citizens, raising concerns about the threshold being applied before arrest warrants are issued. Data from Frederick and Wicomico Counties has indicated that more than 80% of cases initiated through court commissioners in 2024 resulted in no conviction.

House Bill 336 would prevent district court commissioners from issuing warrants based on citizen complaints. If a commissioner believes public safety demands issuance of a warrant, both the State's Attorney and a judge would have to agree before such a warrant could be issued. This would ensure that the serious decision to have someone arrested would be subject to serious legal review and reduce the potential for abuse.

Reporting by The Baltimore Banner highlighted the real-life impact of this system. For example, Tahirah Williams was arrested following allegations made by her neighbor through this process. She spent days in jail and lost her daycare license. Two months later the state dropped all charges against her. Baltimore Mayor Brandon Scott was involved in an incident in which a volunteer from another campaign attacked him. This volunteer changed the story of what occurred, stating that the mayor attacked them, and sought charges against Mr. Scott.

Maryland is one of only eight states that provides individuals with the most latitude to bring about charges. Delaware eliminated this practice in 2022. According to the Delaware Justice of the Peace Court, this change has increased public safety. HB336 would protect people from false accusation while ensuring that warrants can still be issued in cases of true danger. For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to **support Criminal Procedure – District Court Commissioners and False Statements HB336.**

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

John Ford

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Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore