

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

This testimony is being submitted in collaboration with Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore and CASA. I am a resident District 46 in Baltimore City. When I am stopped in the City by a law enforcement officer, or call 911 for help, I can generally trust the person I am interacting with is a legitimate officer and that we will both be safe in that interaction. When secret police – generally defined as enforcement officers that hide their faces and identities while doing operations – are added to the equation, as has happened in the last year, that is no longer the case. **I am testifying in support of SB1 - Public Safety - Law Enforcement Officers - Prohibition on Face Coverings.**

In the State of Maryland, we expect the law enforcement officers who serve our communities to openly identify themselves as such when doing their jobs. Law enforcement agencies have policies requiring officers to wear uniforms or other identifying markers in most circumstances, and we even have a law - Criminal Procedure Article 2-109 - which requires a police officer to identify him or herself by name, agency, and badge number when approaching a citizen for a traffic stop or other investigation.

Throughout 2025, we saw copious news coverage of federal law enforcement actions conducted by officers wearing street clothes and balaclavas. The fact that incidents of police impersonation have been on the rise in Maryland and nationally is not a coincidence: when it becomes impossible to determine who is a legitimate law enforcement officer, criminals can more plausibly claim to be police by simply putting on a mask, no fake uniform or badge required. Even the FBI has recognized the danger, circulating a bulletin to law enforcement agencies in October 2025 that warned criminals were taking advantage of routine mask-wearing by law enforcement to disguise themselves as ICE agents.¹ This confusion also makes routine law enforcement operations more dangerous. Initial contact between officer and civilian is often the most uncertain and dangerous moment in a law enforcement encounter, and ensuring that everyone is on the same page about what is happening can help prevent rash and dangerous decisions.

SB1 would require the creation of a model masking policy banning the routine use of full face masks to conceal the identity of law enforcement officers, and require law enforcement agencies operating in Maryland to adopt that policy or its equivalent. Officers would still be permitted to wear necessary tactical and safety equipment, and full face masks could be authorized under specific, defined circumstances. But use of this policy would reinforce a clear distinction between officers conducting enforcement actions, and criminals hiding their faces to masquerade as law enforcement, making everyone safer. It is for these reasons that I am encouraging you to vote **in support of SB1, Public Safety - Law Enforcement Officers - Prohibition on Face Coverings.**

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,
John Preston Ford
529 S East Ave
Baltimore, MD 21224

¹ Cameron, Dell & Haskins, Caroline, "FBI warns of criminals posing as ICE, urges agents to ID themselves." WIRED Magazine, Nov. 4, 2025. <https://www.wired.com/story/fbi-warns-of-criminals-posing-as-ice-urges-agents-to-id-themselves/>