



Testimony - SB 1, Public Safety - Law Enforcement Officers - Prohibition on Face
Coverings
Favorable

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

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Honorable Chairman Smith & Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee:

SEIU Local 500 represents thousands of public sector workers in Maryland who serve our communities every day—from education and social services to public safety-adjacent roles. Central to our mission is advocating for transparent, accountable, and community-centered public safety systems that earn the trust of all residents.

Senate Bill 1 advances these principles by setting statewide standards on the use of face coverings by law enforcement officers while on duty. At a moment when trust between communities and law enforcement remains fragile, adopting clear policies that prioritize visibility, accountability, and public confidence is critical.

Recent national events illustrate why this is so important. Across the country, federal law enforcement activity—particularly by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)—has raised widespread concerns about overreach, lack of transparency, and harm to public trust. In Minnesota, for example, a U.S. immigration agent fatally shot a citizen during an enforcement operation, an incident that has triggered strong public outcry and long-running litigation alleging excessive and dangerous federal tactics.

In other shocking examples, federal agents forcibly entered a private home and brought a naturalized U.S. citizen into freezing conditions in minimal clothing, later releasing him without explanation or apology—a moment that resonated nationally and elicited widespread criticism.

Communities in multiple states have pushed back against what they describe as ICE overreach, passing resolutions and supporting lawsuits arguing that federal enforcement actions have exceeded legal authority and undermined civil liberties.

These controversies aren't isolated—they reflect broader concerns about law enforcement conduct without clear guardrails. When people in our communities feel anonymous forces can operate without accountability or identification, it chills civic participation, erodes trust, and can make it harder for other public servants—teachers, health workers, social service providers—to do their jobs effectively.

Senate Bill 1's focus on ensuring officers remain identifiable and accountable when carrying out official duties responds directly to this moment. The legislation strikes the right balance by providing exceptions for bona fide safety, tactical, and medical needs, while preventing blanket or pretextual use of face coverings that shield officers from accountability.

Our members see daily the consequences when public systems lack transparent standards. Clear statewide guidelines for law enforcement foster stronger relationships between officers and the communities they serve—a necessary foundation for public safety that protects workers, families, and neighborhoods alike.

For these reasons, SEIU Local 500 urges the Committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 1. Thank you to Senate leadership for recognizing the importance of transparency and public trust through this legislation.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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