



## TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 155

### Public Safety – Police Officers – Face Coverings

Members of the House Judiciary committee

DATE: February, 24, 2026

#### **Sponsored by**

**Delegates:** Williams, Lehman, Pena-Melnyk, Behler, Boafu, Charkoudian, Crutchfield, Feldmark, Foley, Forbes, Guyton, Harrison, Hill, Ivey, Kaufman, Korman, Martinez, Mireku-North, Palakovich Carr, Pasteur, Ruth, Schindler, Solomon, Stinnett, Wilkins, Wims, Woorman, Wu, Young, and Ziegler

Support for HB 155 - Prohibition of Face Coverings for Police Officers in Normal Duties

Honorable Members of the Committee,

People On The Go of Maryland is a statewide self-advocacy/systems advocacy organization led by and for people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities more commonly referred to by professionals without disabilities as (I/DD). We are writing today in strong support of HB 155,

which would prohibit/not allow police officers from wearing face coverings while performing their normal duties, with appropriate exceptions for undercover work and legitimate health or safety emergencies this bill also requires the Maryland police training commission to develop clear rules/standards around when it is appropriate to wear a mask/face covering.

## **Why This Matters for People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities**

For people with I/DD, clear and effective communication is essential especially in stressful or confusing situations. Many individuals/people in our community rely heavily on facial expressions, lip reading, and visual cues to understand what is being said and to assess/figure out whether a situation is safe. When police officers wear face coverings during routine interactions, it creates significant barriers:

- **Communication Barriers:** Many people with I/DD process information differently and depend on seeing a person's full face to understand tone, intent, and instructions. A covered face can make it nearly impossible to read emotions or follow verbal/spoken directions
- **Increased Anxiety and Fear:** Encounters with law enforcement can already be intimidating. When an officer's face is hidden, it can heighten fear, confusion, and anxiety making it harder for individuals to respond appropriately or advocate for themselves/someone else; like a parent advocating for their child.
- **Difficulty Building Trust:** Trust between police and the disability community is built through human connections. Seeing an officer's face helps people with I/DD feel safer, more respected, and more willing to cooperate and communicate.
- **Risk of Misunderstanding:** People with I/DD are already at higher risk of being misunderstood or misinterpreted during police encounters. Face coverings add another layer of confusion that can escalate situations unnecessarily.

## **Benefits for the Community at Large**

This legislation is not only critical for people with disabilities it benefits everyone. Transparent, accountable policing strengthens public safety and community trust:

- **Accountability and Transparency:** Visible faces make officers identifiable and accountable. This is a cornerstone of democratic policing and helps prevent abuses of power.
- **De-escalation:** Officers who show their faces are more likely to be seen as approachable and human, which can de-escalate/calm down tense situations and reduce the likelihood of conflict.
- **Community Policing:** Building relationships between police and the communities they serve requires openness and visibility. Face coverings undermine these efforts.

- **Public Confidence:** When the public can see and identify the officers sworn to protect them, it fosters/creates greater confidence in law enforcement and the justice system.

### **Reasonable Exceptions Are Included**

We recognize that there are legitimate circumstances where face coverings may be necessary—such as undercover operations, hazardous material situations, or public health emergencies. HB 155 appropriately accounts for these exceptions while ensuring that routine, everyday policing is conducted with full transparency and respect for the dignity of all community members.

### **Conclusion**

People On the Go of Maryland requests for you to support HB 155. This bill promotes clear communication, reduces fear and confusion, and strengthens trust between law enforcement and the communities they serve especially for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities who are too often overlooked in policy discussions.

Policing should be transparent, accountable, and human. HB 155 helps ensure that it is.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Mat Rice Executive Director

People on The Go of Maryland

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