



**SUPPORT - HB 155**

**Written Testimony** of National Lawyers Guild-National Police Accountability Project, Keisha James, Staff Attorney  
**House Judiciary Committee** – Tuesday, February 24, 2026

Dear Chair Bartlett, Vice Chair Davis, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written comment on this important issue. The National Lawyers Guild National Police Accountability Project (“NPAP”) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to holding law enforcement officers accountable to constitutional and professional standards. We urge you to give a favorable review to HB 155, which requires the Maryland Police Training and Standards Commission to create a model policy prohibiting law enforcement officers from covering their faces while carrying out their duties. HB 155 would apply to *all* law enforcement agencies with officers operating in Maryland. This bill is a critical measure to ensure accountability and transparency in policing, particularly given the extraordinary powers entrusted to law enforcement officers.<sup>1</sup>

Law enforcement officers possess immense and unique authority to interrogate, detain, and arrest individuals, and to carry weapons they can use to threaten or end an individual’s life. In a democratic society, those who wield such state-sanctioned power must be accountable to the public. Civilians have a fundamental right to know who is exercising that power in their community. But accountability is fundamentally undermined when law enforcement officers carry out their duties anonymously.

The cover of anonymity empowers law enforcement officers to move through communities with impunity. In situations where law enforcement officers obscure their faces with balaclavas, ski masks, gaiters, or other types of masks, Maryland residents have neither the ability to identify or report instances of misconduct nor take further recourse if their rights are violated. Permitting law enforcement officers to execute their duties under a blanket of anonymity corrodes public trust in law enforcement, especially at a time when only a slim majority of adults in the United States express confidence in police.<sup>2</sup> Waning public trust in law enforcement negatively affects law enforcement efforts. If communities do not trust law enforcement, they are less likely to call for help, report crimes, or cooperate

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<sup>1</sup> See President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing, Final Report, OFFICE OF COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING SERVICES 1 (May 2015) (“Law enforcement agencies should also establish a culture of transparency and accountability to build public trust and legitimacy.”).

<sup>2</sup> Gallup News Service: June 3-23, 2024 – June Wave 1, Final Topline, GALLUP (June 3-23, 2024), [https://news.gallup.com/file/poll/647321/2024\\_07\\_15\\_Confidence%20Institutions.pdf](https://news.gallup.com/file/poll/647321/2024_07_15_Confidence%20Institutions.pdf).



in investigations.<sup>3</sup> Further, community distrust in police can lead to civil unrest which, in turn, may result in a violent police response, which breeds even more distrust and unrest in the community.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, when law enforcement officers are permitted to obscure their identities, there is a higher risk that bad actors will impersonate law enforcement, further contributing to a degradation of public trust and safety.<sup>5</sup> It is difficult for members of the public to discern sworn law enforcement from impersonators “particularly when [they are] wearing plain clothes and no visible marker of identity.”<sup>6</sup> The result is “fear and panic across communities” as people react to masked individuals trying to do harm.<sup>7</sup> The United States has a history of adopting anti-masking statutes to prevent bad actors from concealing their identities while perpetrating these harms.<sup>8</sup> The majority of anti-masking statutes originated in the twentieth century, particularly in response to preventing Ku Klux Klansmen from “concealing their identities while terrorizing their communities.”<sup>9</sup>

Over the last year, masked Immigration and Customs Enforcement (“ICE”) officers and other federal agents have descended on towns and cities, stoking fear and amplifying anxiety in communities across the country, including in Maryland.<sup>10</sup> The status quo

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<sup>3</sup> See Katherine J. Bies, *Let the Sunshine In: Illuminating the Powerful Role Police Unions Play in Shielding Officer Misconduct*, 28 STAN. L. & POL’Y REV. 109, 118–19 (2017) (“Accountable and transparent decision-making is imperative because police officers play a unique role in society: the state sanctioned ability to use force against other citizens. Both police departments and individual officers should be held publicly accountable for the manner in which they perform their official duties . . . Greater transparency also allows the public to determine whether police departments and individuals are treating people with respect and fairness.”). *But see* Sunita Patel, *Toward Democratic Police Reform: A Vision for “Community Engagement Provisions in DOJ Consent Decrees*, 51 WAKE FOREST L. REV. 793, 802 (2016) (“[W]hen police processes are perceived as procedurally just, communities are more likely to cooperate with the police, and policing, in turn, is more effective.”).

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Cynthia Conti-Cook, *A New Balance: Weighing Harms of Hiding Police Misconduct Information from the Public*, 22 CUNY L. REV. 148, 158 (2019) (“The deflections, delays, and denials of responsibility for police violence cause more unrest and distrust.”).

<sup>5</sup> Philip Bump, *A Dangerous New Factor in An Uneasy Moment: Unidentified Law Enforcement Officers*, THE WASHINGTON POST (June 4, 2020), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/06/03/dangerous-new-factor-an-uneasy-moment-unidentified-law-enforcement-officers/>.

<sup>6</sup> Jenny Jarvie, *ICE Agents Wearing Masks Add New Levels of Intimidation, Confusion During L.A. Raids*, Los Angeles Times (July 7, 2025), <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2025-07-07/masking-of-federal-agents-very-dangerous-and-perfectly-legal>.

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

<sup>8</sup> See, e.g., Nicholas Dougherty, *Anti-Masking Statutes and Anonymous Protest in the Age of Surveillance*, 18 SEATTLE J. FOR SOC. JUST. 275, 275–77, 283–84 (2020).

<sup>9</sup> *Id.* at 283.

<sup>10</sup> Leila Fadel, et al., *Masked Immigration Agents are Spurring Fear and Confusion Across the U.S.*, NPR (July 10, 2025), <https://www.npr.org/2025/07/09/nx-s1-5440311/ice-raids-masked-agents>; Nicole Pilsbury, *More than*



presents a double standard: while anti-masking statutes aid law enforcement officers in identifying civilians who have perpetuated violence, those same officers can conceal their own identities while engaged in misconduct, disempowering communities from seeking accountability and protection from abuses of power. While officials argue that masking is necessary to protect law enforcement from doxxing, allowing them to hide their faces from the public prioritizes shielding law enforcement from accountability over the safety and security of the community members law enforcement agencies purport to serve.

We urge you to support transparency in policing and give HB 155 a favorable review. I am happy to answer any questions you may have. You can contact me at [keisha.npap@nlg.org](mailto:keisha.npap@nlg.org).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Keisha James', written over a white background.

Keisha James  
National Police Accountability Project

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*3,300 Marylanders were detained by ICE in 2025, twice the number of preceding years*, Maryland Matters (Jan. 11, 2026), <https://marylandmatters.org/2026/01/11/more-than-3300-marylanders-were-detained-by-ice-in-2025-twice-the-number-of-preceding-years/>; Kate Amara and Khiree Stewart, *'It scares me': Marylanders protesting as data shows ICE arrests nearly tripled in 2025*, WBAL (Jan. 12, 2026), <https://www.wbaltv.com/article/marylanders-protesting-data-ice-arrests-nearly-tripled-2025/69980610> (“A new batch of data shows ICE has increased enforcement action across Maryland.”).