

Testimony on House Bill – Favorable

HB1415- Public Safety - Law Enforcement Officers - Identification

March 9, 2026

Dear Honorable Chair and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony IN FAVOR of HB1415, which will direct establishment of policy requiring law enforcement operating in Maryland to wear clear identification while on duty, as well as establishing standards for when identification is to be displayed.

Numerous precedents exist for requiring law enforcement to identify themselves. At the constitutional level, the Fourth Amendment has commonly and successfully been argued to require law enforcement identification to demonstrate legal authority and “reasonableness” of searches. At the federal level, within the National Defense Authorization Act (HR 6395) passed in 2021, there is a requirement that military and civilian law enforcement officers responding to civil disturbances display visible identification and agency affiliation.

Maryland already has strong and admirable requirements for how officers in most state and local forces are required to identify themselves. These can be adapted to become universal at minimal expense to taxpayers and substantial benefit to the community.

Here are a few of the reasons that clear identification of law enforcement officers is important:

- Anonymity has been shown to reduce a person’s sense of accountability, and to increase the chance of rogue behavior. Sharing one’s identity is a basic element contributing to interacting in a civilized way with other human beings.
- Identification can help de-escalate potential conflicts. Citizens will feel less anxious and intimidated if they know who an officer is.
- Without identification, citizens have no redress if a law enforcement officer does abuse them or otherwise acts improperly.
- Lack of identification could endanger law enforcement officers if an armed citizen, reacting quickly in a stressful situation, takes officers for criminals. Or citizens may be endangered fleeing from officers they think are criminals. These are more immediate and likely risks than doxing, which is a non-immediate threat with protection offered by numerous federal and state laws against harassment and cyberstalking.

- If law enforcement can be clearly and universally identified, that decreases opportunity for imposture by criminals and vigilantes (a threat on the rise around the country), and allows verification by civilians that law enforcement officers are legitimate.
- Being able to identify officers as individuals promotes transparency and fosters community trust of law enforcement.

Ideally identification will include name as well as badge number and agency. A name has more psychological impact in building trust and de-escalating conflict. It is also easier to remember than a badge number alone.

Please vote IN FAVOR of HB1415. Thank you for your consideration.

Additional Background:

An Argument for Requiring Officer Identification, University of Chicago Law Review (summary comment) <https://lawreview.uchicago.edu/print-archive/argument-requiring-officer-identification>

The Case for Requiring Federal Law Enforcement Agents to Wear Identifying Insignia (2022), University of Baltimore Law Review, <https://scholarworks.law.ubalt.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2105&context=ublr>

Masked and Unidentifiable, Center for American Progress, <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/masked-and-unidentifiable-the-risks-of-federal-law-enforcement-operating-without-identification/>

New Law Requires Federal Agents to Identify Themselves to Protestors, ACLU, <https://www.aclu.org/news/free-speech/new-law-requires-federal-agents-to-identify-themselves-to-protesters>

Who Is That? The Study of Anonymity and Behavior. Association for Psychological Science, 2018 <https://www.psychologicalscience.org/observer/who-is-that-the-study-of-anonymity-and-behavior>