

February 20, 2026

Support for House Bill 155, Public Safety – Law Enforcement Officers – Prohibition on Face Coverings.

Good afternoon, Delegate Sandy Barlett, Chair, Delegate Debra Davis, Vice Chair, and members of the Judiciary Committee.

Anonymous policing undermines transparency, frustrates accountability systems, and erodes community trust, especially in communities that already experience disproportionate contact with law enforcement. By defining “face covering” broadly to include opaque masks, garments, helmets, or other items that conceal or obscure the face, HB 155 addresses the reality of modern tactical gear and protest-related deployments. At the same time, the bill carefully preserves appropriate exceptions, including those for necessary protective equipment, weather-related gear, and specialized operations where face coverings can be justified by specific, articulable safety needs.

Maryland’s approach in HB 155 is part of a broader national movement toward “No Secret Police”-style reforms that seek to ensure officers exercising state authority are both visible and identifiable. States such as California and Washington, as well as pending proposals in Virginia and other jurisdictions, have moved to prohibit opaque face coverings for law enforcement while preserving narrow exceptions for undercover work and safety-related equipment.

One of the earliest and most visible of these laws in California has already been partially enjoined where it was drafted to target federal officers for special restrictions, rather than applying a neutral rule across all law enforcement. In issuing that injunction, the federal court also indicated that states have a viable path forward when they adopt even-handed, generally applicable bans and identification-display requirements that apply equally to federal, state, and local officers and do not single out federal personnel for disadvantage. By structuring HB 155 as a uniform rule for all law enforcement operating in Maryland, the General Assembly can both advance transparency and align with the contours courts have articulated for constitutionally sound regulation in this area.

HB 155 does more than express a policy preference; it builds a framework that can be enforced.

- It requires the Maryland Police Training and Standards Commission to develop a model policy prohibiting the use of face coverings by law enforcement officers in the performance of duty, while specifying the limited circumstances in which face coverings may be authorized.
- It mandates that each law enforcement agency in the State adopt a policy consistent with, and no less stringent than, the Commission’s model policy.
- It makes clear that generalized and undifferentiated fear or apprehension about officer safety is not, by itself, a valid basis for authorizing face coverings; instead, authorization must be grounded in specific and clearly defined circumstances.
- It establishes that violations constitute police misconduct and creates a misdemeanor offense, with potential imprisonment and fines, while also providing that an officer who violates the statute waives immunity in related civil actions.

I respectfully urge the Committee to give HB 155 a favorable report. Thank you.

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Testimony drafted with assistance from Perplexity AI