



TESTIMONY FOR HB0155

Public Safety – Law Enforcement Officers – Prohibition on Face Coverings

Bill Sponsor: Delegate Williams

Committee: Judiciary

Organization Submitting: Maryland Legislative Coalition

Person Submitting: Aileen Alex, co-chair

Position: FAVORABLE

I am submitting this testimony in favor of HB0155 on behalf of the Maryland Legislative Coalition. The Maryland Legislative Coalition is an association of activists - individuals and grassroots groups in every district in the state. We are unpaid citizen lobbyists, and our Coalition supports well over 30,000 members.

Our members are pretty horrified at what has been happening with federal officers, whether they are Immigration Enforcement or other federal agencies, coming into communities in force wearing military clothes, carrying weaponry that is not suitable for the jobs they are doing, with faces covered like paramilitary gestapos. This serves no one but the irresponsible administration that sent them out like this in the first place.

Face coverings make anyone who wears them and has a weapon feel invincible and that there will be no repercussions for any action they take, no matter how brutal, because they are anonymous. The face coverings terrify anyone who they come near and cause many people to run away out of fear. This gives the officer license to chase them down and inflict more harm.

Law Enforcement Officers used to approach people in a more open and less aggressive manner, so our streets did not seem like something out of a war zone. We have to get back to that. This bill, which we are overwhelmingly in favor of, is a first step. Unmask the people who feel that they are invincible and make them do their jobs without all the aggression. Other than people who have committed major crimes (murder, rape, burglary, etc.), most immigrants have only committed a civil crime (a crime on par with a traffic ticket) which does not warrant the level of a approach that is currently happening.

This bill will prohibit Law Enforcement Officers, whether they are state, local, or federal from hiding their faces with an exception for undercover officers. There are other exceptions for gas masks, masks to protect from viruses, etc. Officers covering their faces can be charged with a misdemeanor and, if convicted, face up to 2 years in jail and a penalty of \$2,000. They also waive any immunity to civil action.

While we understand that there must be exceptions, we feel that the officers involved will use one of those exceptions to cover their faces. We feel, but are unwilling to derail this legislation, that there

should be additional safeguards. For example, any Federal officers coming into Maryland should notify the local police who should ensure they are aware of this law. It would be best if an officer was on the scene to ensure that the law is being followed, but that could put a strain on the local police force

The Maryland Legislative Coalition wholeheartedly supports this bill and recommends a **FAVORABLE** report in committee.