



**NATASHA DARTIGUE**  
PUBLIC DEFENDER

**KEITH LOTRIDGE**  
DEPUTY PUBLIC DEFENDER

**HANNIBAL KEMERER**  
CHIEF OF STAFF

**ELIZABETH HILLIARD**  
DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

## POSITION ON PROPOSED LEGISLATION

**BILL: HB1415 Public Safety - Law Enforcement Officers - Identification**

**FROM: Maryland Office of the Public Defender**

**POSITION: Favorable**

**DATE: March 6, 2026**

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The Maryland Office of the Public Defender respectfully requests that the Committee issue a favorable report on HB1415, requiring clearly visible identification for law enforcement officers operating in Maryland.

Over the last year, the use of full face masks and a lack of clear identification has become widespread among federal law enforcement officers engaged in immigration enforcement. These attempts to remain unidentifiable are often paired with a highly militarized style of dress and equipment, and an unprecedented disregard for the 4<sup>th</sup> Amendment. The terror and desperation that this style of anonymous, aggressive, militarized enforcement is not conducive to safe and peaceful communities. Anonymity for law enforcement agents encourages a sense of impunity and separation from the community, and by fostering this atmosphere, it increases the risks to everyone involved. Easy visual identification, by contrast, allows for both the appearance and the reality of accountability. Requiring law enforcement agents to display a clear indication of who they are and what agency they serve, subject to reasonable exceptions, is one step towards promoting accountability, reducing fear, and ultimately making interactions between law enforcement and Maryland residents safer.

This bill is useful not only in its applicability to the federal agents, but also in its broad applicability to state and local officers. If Maryland law enforcement agencies wish to continue to build trust across the state in order to do their work effectively, they must distance themselves clearly and decisively from the tactics of their counterparts in federal immigration enforcement. A clear identification requirement reaffirms for law enforcement and for the public that each officer is

an identifiable person, accountable both as an individual and also as a representative of a known agency that is bound by the law and subject to public oversight. This, like a prohibition on the use of full face masks in most instances, is a simple way to demonstrate that Maryland's law enforcement officers are not anonymous vigilantes who answer to no one, but rather part of a legal system whose actors operate openly and in accordance with the rule of law.

**For these reasons, the Maryland Office of the Public Defender urges this Committee to issue a favorable report on HB1415.**

**Submitted by: Maryland Office of the Public Defender, Government Relations Division.**

**Authored by: Stephanie Wolf, Director of Immigration Services, [stephanie.wolf@maryland.gov](mailto:stephanie.wolf@maryland.gov).**