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POSITION ON PROPOSED LEGISLATION

BILL: House Bill 794 – Public Safety – Maryland Police Training and Standards Commission – Prohibition Against Certain Affiliation or Support by Police Officers

FROM: Maryland Office of the Public Defender

POSITION: FAVORABLE

DATE: February 24, 2026

The Maryland Office of the Public Defender respectfully requests a favorable report on House Bill 794. This legislation mandates that the Maryland Police Training and Standards Commission implement regulations prohibiting law enforcement officers from affiliating with, supporting, or advocating for white supremacist groups, causes, or ideologies, and from participating in or actively promoting any international or domestic extremist group that the Federal Bureau of Investigation has determined supports or encourages illegal violent conduct. This is a necessary step to ensure public safety, rebuild trust between law enforcement and communities—particularly Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC)—and address long-standing racial disparities in policing.

Public safety depends on trust—trust that officers enforce the law without bias, without allegiance to extremist ideologies, and without undermining the rights of Maryland’s diverse communities. When officers maintain ties to white supremacist organizations, it creates a climate of fear, increases racial profiling, and weakens public cooperation with law enforcement. The presence of such officers threatens both community safety and the integrity of our justice system.

Racial disparities in police interactions are well-documented. Studies consistently show that Black and Brown Marylanders are disproportionately stopped, searched, arrested, and subjected to the use of force.¹ The ACLU of Maryland’s *Chasing Justice* report highlights these systemic issues:

- Disproportionate Use of Force: From 2015 to 2019, 91% of Baltimore Police Department use-of-force incidents targeted Black residents, who make up only 63% of the city’s population.
- Misconduct Complaints: 1,826 officers faced complaints, yet only 8% of external complaints were sustained.

¹Maryland Governor’s Office of Crime Prevention, Youth, and Victim Services. Maryland Use of Force Data Collection Program: Annual Report 2023. https://gocpp.maryland.gov/wp-content/uploads/PS-%C2%A7-3-528d_-GOCPP_-2023-Report-on-Use-of-Force-Incidents.pdf.

- Racial Bias in Complaint Outcomes: Complaints from white residents were sustained at higher rates, while complaints against Black officers were upheld more frequently, suggesting racial bias.²

These findings underscore the urgent need to prevent officers from affiliating with white supremacist groups, as required by House Bill 794. The presence of such officers exacerbates racial disparities, fuels distrust, and perpetuates systemic inequities.

By passing House Bill 794, Maryland reaffirms its commitment to an unbiased, accountable, and community-centered approach to policing. This measure will help restore public confidence, strengthen police-community relations, and ensure that all Marylanders are protected equally under the law.

The Maryland Office of the Public Defender strongly urges the Committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 794.

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

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² ACLU of Maryland. Chasing Justice: Addressing Police Violence and Misconduct in Maryland. August 2021. https://www.aclu-md.org/sites/default/files/field_documents/aclu-md_chasingjusticereport_aug2021.pdf.