

Testimony to the House of Delegates Judiciary Committee
HB 1415 : Public Safety - Law Enforcement Officers - Identification
Position: Favorable

March 6, 2025

The Honorable Sandy Bartlett, Chair
House Judiciary Committee
100 State Circle, State House
Annapolis, MD 21401
cc: Members, Judiciary Committee

Chair Bartlett and Members of the Committee:

My name is Jordy Diaz and I am a resident of Legislative District 16. As the son of Honduran immigrants I have seen firsthand the fear that unaccountable policing creates in our neighborhoods. I am submitting this testimony in strong support of HB 1415 because my community cannot afford to wait for basic transparency from law enforcement.

While this committee debates broader police reform we have to address the basic uniform. An officer operating without clear identification is a complete breakdown of accountability. Right now federal task forces are deliberately blurring the lines of jurisdiction. When an armed individual detains a resident in Maryland that person has an absolute right to know if they are dealing with a local public servant or a federal agent acting outside their boundaries. Without a visible name and badge number that distinction vanishes. An unmarked officer is legally indistinguishable from an armed vigilante.

This anonymity creates a massive financial liability for the state. Think about the reality of the situation. When an unidentified officer violates a civil right the victim cannot hold that specific individual accountable. They have to sue the jurisdiction instead. By allowing officers to hide their identities the legislature forces Maryland taxpayers to foot the bill for police misconduct. A visible badge number is a basic administrative tracking tool that protects both the public and the state budget.

Justifying this anonymity through the lens of officer safety sets a dangerous precedent. History shows us exactly what happens when the state allows armed groups to operate without public identification. During the Homestead Strike of 1892 the government permitted Pinkerton agents to act as an unaccountable shadow force. Because they operated without official state identification or public oversight the result was violence and a complete breakdown of the rule of law. Removing accountability guarantees abuse.

High threat environments do not excuse a lack of transparency. Active duty military personnel and emergency room doctors manage volatile situations every day while wearing clear identification. Allowing state agents to operate anonymously is a breakdown of institutional control. State law enforcement must be held to the same basic standard of public oversight.

Passing HB 1415 is a critical step in addressing the systemic lack of accountability in our justice system. It will help prevent abuses of power, reduce harm to marginalized communities, and ensure that our state policies reflect the values of transparency and equity. I urge the committee to issue a favorable report on HB 1415.

Sincerely,

Jordy Diaz

