



Office of The Mayor Celina R. Benitez

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February 20, 2026

Re: **Strong support of House Bill 155**

Chair Bartlett, Vice Chair Davis, and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

I respectfully submit this testimony in **strong support of House Bill 155**, which promotes transparency, accountability, and public trust in law enforcement by prohibiting the use of face coverings by law enforcement officers during official duties, except when engaged in undercover operations.

This legislation is especially important given our community's strong emphasis on relationship-based, community-oriented public safety. Mount Rainier is a diverse municipality where residents regularly interact with the same officers at community events, neighborhood patrols, and local meetings. Clear visibility and identification of officers during these interactions is essential to maintaining trust, de-escalating conflict, and ensuring that residents feel safe and respected. When community members can clearly see and identify the officers serving them, it strengthens legitimacy, improves cooperation, and supports the collaborative public safety model Mount Rainier has worked hard to build.

HB 155 strikes an appropriate and thoughtful balance between **public transparency and officer safety**. By directing the Maryland Police Training and Standards Commission to develop a model policy, the bill ensures statewide consistency while allowing for professional standards grounded in best practices. At the same time, the exception for undercover operations appropriately recognizes circumstances where anonymity is necessary to protect officers and preserve the integrity of investigations.

This legislation because it reinforces the principle that public servants, especially those entrusted with significant authority, should operate in a manner that is visible and accountable to the communities they serve. Clear identification not only protects residents, but also protects officers by reducing confusion, miscommunication, and mistrust during interactions.

For these reasons, I urged the Committee to issue a **favorable report on House Bill 155** and move this important legislation forward.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony and for your continued commitment to public safety and good governance. Please feel free to contact me at 301-985-6585 or via email MayorBenitez@MountRainierMd.org if you have any questions.

Respectfully submitted,

Celina R. Benitez

Mayor Celina R. Benitez, City of Mount Rainier.