Testimony to the House of Delegates Judiciary Committee
HB 155 : Public Safety - Law Enforcement Officers - Prohibition on Face Coverings
Position: Favorable

February 29, 2024

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. I am a resident of Legislative District 16 offering favorable testimony in support of SB 1 and HB 155. In February 2024 I submitted written testimony to the legislature warning that leaving the tools of state power unchecked would have severe consequences for vulnerable populations. We are now witnessing that reality. Federal agents are operating with impunity in our neighborhoods. They stop and attack men, women, and children simply for looking Black or Brown. As of Sunday a fleet of ICE vehicles arrived at the Hagerstown detention site. That threat is now parked just an hour away from my community in Montgomery County.

Anonymity breeds cruelty. Allowing state, local, and federal law enforcement to hide behind masks undermines public trust and increases the terror of these encounters. SB 1 provides the structural mechanics to end this. It requires the Maryland Police Training and Standards Commission to develop a model policy prohibiting the use of face coverings by law enforcement officers in the course of duty. This affirms a commitment to transparency and accountability.

There are no administrative or financial excuses to delay this bill. The fiscal note from the Department of Legislative Services explicitly states that this legislation will not materially affect State or local finances. The bill also protects officer safety by including clear exceptions for those actively engaged in undercover operations. Beyond those authorized parameters a mask is simply a shield to evade public oversight.

History proves that appeasement does not curb cruelty. In 1850 Northern states passed the Fugitive Slave Act believing compromise would preserve peace. That calculation turned free states into hunting grounds and allowed federal agents to kidnap Black men and women with the backing of law and order. Stalling this mask ban invites that same terror back into Maryland.

My community cannot afford to wait while leaders calculate political risks. I am asking you to use your authority to protect our neighborhoods. I urge a Favorable report on SB 1 and HB 155.

Best,
Jordy Diaz