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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HBI090

Law Enforcement – Complaints and Investigations and Use of Force (Anton’s Law)

TO: Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Atterbeary, members of the Judiciary Committee

FROM: Samantha Blau

My name is Samantha Blau, I am a resident of Baltimore’s Patterson Place neighborhood in District 46. I am also a former educator with over ten year’s experience working with students and teachers in Baltimore City and across the state of Maryland. As a teacher, an organizer, and a resident of Baltimore I submit this testimony in favor of HBI090.

Anton’s Law is a large and comprehensive bill, but as I have taught students—just because the language used to describe a scientific law sounds complicated it does not mean it cannot be simply demonstrated. Maxwell’s equations describe the relationship between magnetism and electricity, and while a fourth grader may not be able to reproduce the mathematics they can appreciate the demonstration of using an electric current to make two pieces of metal magnetic. Anton’s Law describes how the citizenry can expect to hold an armed police force accountable for potentially deadly acts. I may not be able to reproduce a description of “deadly force” as a lawyer could, but I have, unfortunately, seen multiple demonstrations of what happens when police who go unchecked harm and kill my fellow citizens.

I believe that right now the only thing standing between myself and harm from a police officer is the color of my skin. If I were a black woman living in my neighborhood every day would be a Russian roulette of interactions; will today be the day I meet an officer who has multiple complaints of force? While this committee cannot end the institution of racism in one fell swoop, it can pass a law that empowers citizens to use the tools already available to them. The Maryland Public Information Act (MPIA) is a tool that is currently blunted because police records are considered exclusively private. However, if officers’ complaints against them for job-related misconduct are accessible through the MPIA, then citizens can ask legitimate questions about state employees who have the power to harm.

This committee cannot fix everything, but it can take a major step towards making a difference. As Rabbi Tarfon taught: “It is not your responsibility to finish the work [of perfecting the world], but neither are you free to desist from it either.” **So do the work that you can now, and please give a favorable report to HBI090.**