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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB1090

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

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

FROM: Louise Weissman

My name is Louise Weissman. I am a resident of Greenbelt, Maryland in District 22. I am writing this testimony in support of HB 1090 - Anton’s Law. The Jewish call for Tzedek (Justice) and Tikkun Olam (Repair the World) are central to my values.

I believe law enforcement should serve and protect everyone, but our Black and Brown neighbors routinely face systemic violence and over-policing. Jewish tradition teaches us that destroying one life is akin to destroying the entire world. Police violence has destroyed entire worlds of individuals and families of color because our laws do not support accountability and transparency. Currently, the Maryland Public Information Act (MPIA) prevents the public from even finding out about officers’ mistreatment of people, and this must stop.

I want to share a story about a family I know. In the late 90’s, a couple fostered two siblings, a boy (8) and his older sister (10) with a plan to adopt them. Both children, but especially the girl, had suffered severe abuse and neglect by their birth family. They were both in and out of foster care since the brother was one. Once the children moved in with the couple, they had several in-patient acute care admissions and the daughter was in and out of residential treatment. Despite those challenges, the couple adopted the children after 5 years.

The boy is now an adult. He is the responsible father of a 2 year old boy, and works two jobs to support the family. The daughter has struggled, and is on disability with alcohol and drug problems and recently was given an updated diagnosis of Complex PTSD. She has had a few run-ins with law enforcement, including arrest. She has been to court more than one time; she is currently on probation. But here’s the point: she is white, and I can’t help but feel that if she were Black or Brown, she would likely be in jail or, worse, dead. Her white skin privilege has protected her from the brutality police often show to her peers of color.

I support the passage of Anton's Law as a deterrent that can help eliminate law enforcement violence and give a degree of hope to survivors of police misconduct and violence and their families. Let's bring justice for Anton Black and his family and increase transparency and accountability by our law enforcement officers throughout the state. **I respectfully urge a favorable report on HBI090.**