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TO: Senator William C. Smith, Jr., Chair
Senator Jeff Waldstreicher, Vice Chair
Judicial Proceedings Committee Members

FROM: Maryland Legislative Latino Caucus (MLLC)

DATE: January 21, 2021

RE: SB178 Public Information Act – Personnel Records –
Investigations of Law Enforcement Officers (Anton’s Law)

The MLLC supports SB178 Public Information Act – Personnel Records – Investigations of Law Enforcement Officers (Anton’s Law).

The MLLC is a bipartisan group of Senators and Delegates committed to supporting legislation that improves the lives of Latinos throughout our state. The MLLC is a crucial voice in the development of public policy that uplifts the Latino community and benefits the state of Maryland. Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to express our support of SB178.

Police misconduct is an issue that we see happening too often in our daily lives, seeing it on the news, hearing a story from a friend, or even witnessing it ourselves. Police misconduct can be excessive, even deadly, and just watching it occur again and again is unacceptable. Issues of policing impact everyone in Maryland, but disproportionately harm minority populations. Black and Brown communities tend to be the most terrorized by abusive law enforcement officers. Many of the harmful police officers have a pattern of violent or offensive behavior, yet little to no action can be taken because of the lack of transparency and accountability.

19-year-old, Anton Black became a victim of misconduct when the officer involved in his death, Thomas Webster IV, had a dangerous past that no one accessed because of current Maryland Public Information Act (MPIA) laws. It was later discovered that Mr. Webster had multiple accusations of brutality and excessive use of force complaints against him from his previous place of employment, a Delaware police department. Access to these records is a means for accountability and transparency that enables proper vetting of our law enforcement.

SB178 requires records related to a formal complaint of job-related misconduct made against a police officer not personnel records. By making these records public, this bill emphasizes an increase in transparency while prioritizing a more equitable way to expose prior allegations of wrongdoing of an officer. All our communities in Maryland should be able to trust police officers and have quality law enforcement. It is time to take appropriate action to achieve accountability and trust.

The MLLC supports this bill and urges a favorable report on SB178.