

January 19, 2021

Testimony in Support of SB0178 – Public Information Act – Personnel Records – Investigations of Law Enforcement Officers

Honorable Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee:

I submit this testimony in support of SB0178 as a youth group leader, mediator, former community leader, and a longtime Baltimore City resident. In my professional career, I spent over 20 years in the health insurance industry focusing on privacy requirements, among other topics. During my 20 years of advocating on behalf of Baltimore City residents, particularly youth, I have seen a concerning disintegration of discipline and ethics within law enforcement aided by misunderstanding of privacy and confidentiality rights.

In the current environment, many law enforcement officers have been proven to demonstrate patterns of abuse of authority. The current law treats internal investigations of law enforcement officers as privileged personnel records. In some cases, such as those related to health issues, overall performance evaluations, or salary keeping information private from third parties is understandable. In the case of complaints, particularly repeat complaints, keeping these records privileged enables officers who demonstrate a pattern of abuse of the law to continue that abuse.

In 2018 complaints were filed against a Baltimore City police officer alleging harassment. By 2020, despite inaction by the Baltimore City Internal Affairs investigator, 11 victims of the same officer were identified. If the initial investigators or Civilian Review Board had access to the officer's personnel file with complaint information the pattern of abuse would have been apparent, and further harm prevented. Instead the current law enabled continued abuse of additional victims.

When the state allows one individual to commit an act of harm against another it is a tragedy. When the state refusing to amend laws that systemically allow a category of individuals to repeatedly commit acts of harm against vulnerable victims it is more than a tragedy, it is a travesty of the legislative system.

I strongly urge you to support SB0178, at the very least make unsustained complaints available to investigators, including the Civilian Review Board, to highlight patterns of abuse within law enforcement.

Respectfully submitted,

Natasza Bock-Singleton,

President and Founder, Bloom and Grow!