



HOMELESS PERSONS REPRESENTATION PROJECT, INC.

201 North Charles Street, Suite 1104, Baltimore, Maryland 21201 (Headquarters)

(410) 685-6589 Toll Free (800) 773-4340 Fax (410) 625-0361

PO Box 1787, Rockville, Maryland 20849 (410) 387-3126 (Satellite Office)

www.hprplaw.org info@hprplaw.org

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Administrative Assistant

January 19, 2021

Re: Written Testimony In Support of SB 178/ HB 120-- Anton's Law

Dear Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee:

My name is Gabriela Sevilla and I am an Equal Justice Works Fellow at Homeless Persons Representation Project leading a new Medical- Legal Partnership serving the legal needs of persons experiencing homelessness in Baltimore City. Homeless Persons Representation Project is one of 75 organizations that represent the Maryland Coalition for Justice and Policy Accountability and we support the passing of Anton's Law.

Currently when community members file a complaint of police misconduct they are not given access to how the department investigated the complaint because it becomes part of the officer's "personnel record" under Maryland's Public Information Act, and may never be disclosed. The community member would only be able to find out the outcome and any discipline. The actual process of the investigation is left a secret to the community and most egregiously the person who filed the complaint. This process does not promote community oversight and further deteriorates community trust in police. There should not be any secrets if we have the same goal of ensuring officers are upholding their values of being honest and dedicated public servants.

This process does not have to be this way, twenty- nine other states make disclosure of complaint files more accessible to the public than Maryland. This bill would remove the complaint file from the personnel record category, thereby allowing the police department to disclose information to the community member of how the investigation of police misconduct was conducted. This is what justice looks like. Just like a victim may attend the trial of someone who committed a crime against them, a person who submits a complaint of police misconduct should be given access to the complaint file in order to learn how the investigation was conducted.

We need the community to trust police especially at a time where Baltimore City had over 300 murders last year, there are daily reports of police brutality against black lives and people in a mental health crisis across the country, and the unearthing that among those who stormed the capital earlier this month were police officers who aligned themselves with the alt-right movement. It is in the best interest of the community and the police departments that serve them that we work to rebuild community trust with police.

Please support SB 178/ HB 120- Anton's Law if you want to see a Maryland with a restored sense of trust in the police.

Sincerely,

Gabriela Ines Sevilla, Esq.
gsevilla@hprplaw.org.