

SB 178- FAVORABLE

My name is Rev. Marguerite Morris and I am one of your constituents. I am also the founder of For Kathy's Sake, Community Actively Seeking Transparency (C.A.S.T.), and the mother of a deceased young woman named Katherine Sarah Morris. I have been in an eight year legal battle with police calling for greater transparency and accountability in matters related to her death.

While I support all five of the ACLU's policing priorities, this testimony is provided in support of SB178/HB120, Anton's law calling for MPIA Reform which can make possible police accountability. Without MPIA reform, police reform is impossible.

On this past week, I sat at a screen from a remote location, and witnessed the sentencing hearing of the killer of a young African American college student named Lt. Richard W. Collins III. A scene all too familiar. That of watching parents emotionally stretched to the edge, after already having suffered way too much. They'd suffered not only the loss of their child, but through the painful limbo of not knowing if the person, that played a part in having caused the death, or harm to their loved one, would be held accountable. Every time a victim, or survivors of a victim see someone that harmed them keep moving through society without being held accountable, it re-victimizes them.

So many things about Anton's dying, for his family and friends are still painfully vivid and their suffering, is the same. As a parent that has buried a child I personally think there is no greater pain. That is why it is imperative that we allow impacted persons the comfort and dignity of knowing that their suffering or death was not in vain. With that being said, can we take the unjust and horrific circumstances around Anton's dying and champion it into a law that would help others? That through his death help for countless others would rise. Can his memory live on in the pages of history, by being used to champion the effectiveness, of making transparent the potential pattern of an abuser? The behavior of a person hired to protect, but who uses his employment as a tool of abuse should be exposed through a public record. We do it every day in our judicial systems to others.

Why do we add insult to injury, by allowing for the continued operation of a broken system in which, the complainant, the person who actually filed the complaint, with internal affairs, who gave them the details, who gave them the evidence, who gave them the name of the alleged perpetrator, causing an investigation to be initiated for which, the results and process are immediate classified as a secret to be kept from the complainant. How frustrating is that for a victim or their family?

Why does America have a double standard that has served to disproportionately harm thousands when there are cases upon cases where officers have knowingly engaged in flagrant misconduct? Why is it that some of them are knowingly and repeatedly engaged in criminal conduct? And even when charges or complaints are lodged, they have resulted in an over 90% rate of being un-sustained. Why do we allow that?

We must stop continuing to empower abusers to abuse. Police, policing themselves continue to give rise to conflicts of interest that have become a barrier to oversight in my own county. We as a Nation must rise up and do better. I charge you that as this country continues to cry out for justice for the unjust killing, or beating, or knee necking of our children, that you rise to the occasion and allow this bill to go forward and be enacted into law. In closing, I say thank you for your leadership and willingness to make this needed change to the MPIA by amending it to make it clear, that records of internal investigations will be treated like every other police record about each, and every one of us.