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SB 626

Law Enforcement Officers – Use of Force Hearing before the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee, February 4, 2021 Position: SUPPORT

The Public Justice Center (PJC) supports SB 626 as a critical component of police accountability, transparency, and reform that is long overdue.

True police reform, the need for which can no longer be denied, cannot be accomplished without directly confronting the systemic overuse of force.

The Maryland Coalition for Justice and Police Accountability seeks five critical reforms, and clear, sensible regulation of the use of force is one of those critical pillars. During recent years the over-policing of Black and brown communities and the unjustified killings of countless individuals in Maryland and across the nation have been exposed by heinous example after horrid tragedy. The lack of legal limits on the use of force, lack of training in effective de-escalation techniques, and lack of a requirement that officers report instances of excessive force by others have all played deadly roles in those nightmarish events. As a result, even in the clearest of cases, the perpetrators have avoided justice altogether.

Without limiting the use of force, clearly defining in context what excessive force is, and requiring training and oversight, there can be no rebuilding of trust and cooperation between the public and those sworn to protect and serve.

The great majority of other states have a use of force law. Maryland cannot afford to stay behind.

The PJC is a non-profit legal advocacy organization dedicated to racial equity and ending poverty. Its Prisoners Rights Project seeks basic justice through reform in our criminal justice system and an end to all unnecessary detention and incarceration. Real police reform is critical to achieving those goals.

The PJC urges a FAVORABLE REPORT on SB 626. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Debra Gardner, Legal Director, at gardnerd@publicjustice.org or 410 625 9409 ext 228.