

I am writing to support the passage of “Anton’s Law,” SB178/HB 120.

[NOTE: Please keep the language that requires all complaints to be released, not just sustained complaints, and make sure that all categories of conduct are included. You may want to consider amending the definition of PS 3-101 to include WMATA Metro Transit police as they are not currently included. I am also concerned that the use of the phrase “investigation of misconduct” may be too limiting and you might consider an amendment to “complaint of misconduct.”]

I currently reside in District 20 and am a lifelong Maryland resident. I have served as a public defender in Prince George’s County since 2009. I’ve never previously been active in the Maryland legislative process, but it is clear we can’t simply rely on our fellow citizens to be better trained, better educated or simply better people if we want to see real change. We instead must work to remove systems and laws that protect racism and replace them with laws that protect against racism. Although we need to examine every aspect of Maryland law with this in mind, there is an urgent need regarding police reform.

The police have been guaranteed extra protections through state laws and local collective bargaining agreements that stifle accountability and transparency, as well as destroy any hopes we have for improving relations between the police and the community. I have followed the ACLU legislative agenda for this year and I think its position and legislative priorities are right on track. Please be strong on working to pass the impactful police reforms the ACLU is supporting, starting with passing Anton’s Law. Each of these reforms are needed to change laws that coddle systemic racism in our criminal system.

As a public defender I have seen first-hand how hard it is to access police misconduct or IA files that would shed light on a police officer’s bias or consistent prior bad acts. Sadly, we cannot trust the police to monitor themselves, the large civil lawsuit currently in Prince George’s County between police is an example of why. The community must be given the information needed to provide oversight. If the police are investigating misconduct appropriately then there is nothing to hide.

Given that you are adding strong protections in this law for ways police can still deny the MPIA request I think removing these from a categorization of personnel records is a fair compromise. This law correction would also bring our statute in line with other states since a majority of states already disclose some of these types of records already.

Respectfully,
Jennifer Park
240-441-6595