

**Testimony for the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
February 4, 2021**

SB 626 – Law Enforcement Officers -- Use of Force

FAVORABLE

To Chairman Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Committee members,

My name is Marion Gray-Hopkins and I live in Upper Marlboro, Maryland. I'm formally submitting my written testimony in support of SB 626 on Law Enforcement Officers- Use of Force. I am a registered voter and actively involved in many organizations whose focus is police reform. The local organizations include Prince Georges County Peoples Coalition for Justice, MCJPA, Community Justice, the president of Coalition of Concerned Mothers which is a grassroots organization comprised of mothers who have lost children primarily to police brutality as well as community violence. Additionally I am an active board member of ACLU- MD affiliate. More importantly I am the voice for my son Gary Hopkins, Jr. who at the young age of 19 had his voice silenced due to being a casualty of police violence on November 27, 1999. He had dreams and aspirations. A fulltime college student who looked forward to contributing in a positive way yet like so many others was denied that opportunity because he came into contact with officers who utilized deadly force and were judge, jury and executioner that dreadful day that changed my life forever.

Maryland does not have statutory limits on use of force, and the Supreme Court cases fail to adequately protect the lives and safety of Maryland residents. Instead of merely codifying *Graham* and *Garner* into state law, we must elevate the "objectively reasonable" standard to prohibit officers from using force unless it is **necessary** as a last resort, under the totality of the circumstances, after the officer has exhausted de-escalation and other reasonable alternatives. Although there are other necessary components to a robust use of force statute, failing to change the legal standard will maintain the status quo and let officers remain unaccountable for the harm they cause.

The senseless killings of our loved ones at the hands of police MUST stop. It saddens me to know that over 21,000 have been killed by police since my sons' death most of which are disproportionately black and brown people, many unarmed and who suffered from mental illness.

This body has an opportunity to bridge the divide between community and policing by first acknowledging that there is an issue and then taking action by being on the right side of justice when this time in history is written.

My son aspired to be a writer and one of his final college papers he wrote "It takes a village to bring change". The time for change is long overdue...the time is NOW for a statewide use of force standard that holds officers accountable when they use unlawful force, and ensures that officers will do everything they need to do in order to preserve human life. On behalf of my son, my family, the many other Maryland victims of police brutality and advocates of police reform hope you will/are a part of the village and urge you to vote favorable to SB 626.

Attentively,
Marion Gray-Hopkins