



Testimony for the Judicial Proceedings Committee January 21, 2021 SB 178 – Public Information Act – Personnel Records – Investigations of Law Enforcement Officers (Anton’s Law)

SUPPORT

Young People for Progress (YPP) is a member-based civic and social justice organization of youth and young adults under 35 years old in Montgomery County. We strongly support SB 178 Anton’s Law to reform the Maryland Public Information Act (MPIA) because it is a critical step in increasing police transparency and accountability and restoring some level of public trust in police.

Many young people in Montgomery County and many members of YPP continue to have negative and harmful interactions with police. In fact, on any given month youth and young adults aged 18 to 34 comprise about 20 percent of the Montgomery County population, but 60 percent of the arrests. This is a rate three times higher than their share of the population and higher than every other age demographic. The numbers don’t show the high rate of negative youth and young adult- police interactions that do not result in arrest and are never counted. Nonetheless, it is clear that youth and young adults are among the groups most harmed by police policing problems and a pervasive lack of trust in police.

Over the past year, as we have been collecting residents’, especially youth, accounts of negative interactions with police, we have been faced with the reality that many of these interactions are drastically underreported. There is an overwhelming sense that nothing will be done with complaints, that they will not be seriously investigated, and that police officers will stay on the force regardless of misconduct. In instances that include but are not limited to profiling, assault, sexual harassment of minors, and use of racial slurs---many youth do not even tell their parents or friends because they fear any reporting of misconduct will be futile and could possibly make them greater targets.

The MPIA, as currently written, makes this problem worse because even when residents muster the tremendous courage to make a complaint, they have little access to information about the investigation of their complaint. Furthermore, the public cannot hold police departments accountable because it cannot see which officers have histories of misconduct and which do not. Why encourage youth to report misconduct when there is no assurance that anything will be done? Why tell people to trust police departments when there is no transparency on whether officers with histories of misconduct are promoted within the ranks?

Earlier this month, a 24 year old, Kwamena Ocran, was killed by four plain clothed police officers in Gaithersburg. Today, the public still does not have access to the histories of those officers. We cannot have trust in police or our elected officials if we do not have transparency when our communities are harmed or killed by police. For these reasons, Young People for Progress strongly supports the passage of SB 178.

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