

Eric Simmons
Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 178
Senate Judicial Proceeding Committee Hearing 1/21/21

My name is Eric Simmons and my brother JR and I spent 24 years in prison for a Baltimore murder we did not commit. Two Baltimore detectives framed us for the crime. Senate Bill 178 is important to exposing police misconduct and holding officers accountable to protect other innocent people.

I have a lot of respect for law enforcement. My mother was the first African American woman to work at the FBI's fingerprinting lab, and there are many like her who want to do the right thing and keep the public safe.

There are also officers who break the law. That is why my brother and I lost decades of our life, and the people who actually committed the crime got away with it and went on to commit other crimes.

Police threatened a 13-year-old with murder charges unless he implicated us in the shooting. They also withheld information that a paid informant, who claimed to have seen us commit the crime from her window, was getting a new apartment for her testimony. The officers knew it would have been impossible for the informant to have seen us from there.

One of the officers who framed us was Detective Robert Patton, who was involved in a lot of other wrongful convictions. Detective Patton used the same informant as a witness in several other murders and she kept getting benefits for testifying. In prison, I met other men who were victims of Detective Patton. He was never held accountable, so he continued framing innocent people.

Since I've been exonerated, I've seen how low the trust is between communities and the police. I was visiting my family a few months ago when a Baltimore detective knocked on the door and asked about a shooting that happened nearby. My automatic response was to keep quiet and not talk to an officer. I told him about my wrongful conviction and Detective Patton, and the officer said he was aware of him.

The bad cops are stopping the good ones from doing their jobs and solving crimes. I want to thank all of the Senators on this committee for working on this important issue. Please vote yes on Senate Bill 178.