



Many struggles, one mission.

Testimony SUPPORTING SB0626

February 1, 2021

Dear members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee,

My name is Abby Cocke, and I am a resident of Baltimore City in District 43 and a strong supporter of SB0626. On behalf of Baltimore for Border Justice, a local advocacy and aid organization, I am submitting this testimony to urge you to SUPPORT SB0626, *Law Enforcement Officers – Use of Force*.

The use of force by the state against its people should be a last resort, used when only absolutely necessary to stop an imminent threat after de-escalation techniques have been tried, and stopped the moment it is no longer needed. Maryland is one of only nine states without a policy on this matter, and police brutality against ordinary people runs rampant, with little to no accountability. SB0626 would help to rectify this situation, laying out clear and reasonable requirements limiting the use of force, creating a legal pathway for citizens to seek redress, requiring officers to intervene if a co-worker is violating the policy, and mandating a strong response when an officer goes over the line. We need these protections if we ever hope to be free of the threat of disproportionate and indiscriminate violence from the police, and the trauma, fear, distrust, and enormous expense that it causes.

One case in which a statewide use of force policy could have led to much-needed accountability is in the police shooting of Keith Davis, Jr. After mistaking him for a robber, four officers of the Baltimore Police Department chased him into a dark garage. They shot at him dozens of times, striking him three times and almost ending his life. A woman working at the garage described a bullet whizzing past her, and could easily have lost her life that day. All the bullet casings found at the scene came from the cop's guns. The officers who did this remained on the force without penalty, and Davis and his family have never been able to get any sort of justice for the immense damage done to him. His story is only one of an uncountable number, since most people never even trying to seek restitution because they know how unlikely it is under our current system.

Very simply, what is the purpose of law enforcement? Is it to terrorize and brutalize, or to uphold the rule of law and protect public safety? If the latter, it should be completely uncontroversial to pass the measures in SB0626.

Thank you for your attention and for doing the right thing.

Sincerely,

Abby Cocke
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