

Dear Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

This testimony is being submitted by Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore, a group of white folks working as part of a multi-racial movement for equity and racial justice in Baltimore City and Baltimore County. We are also working in collaboration with the Campaign for Justice, Safety, and Jobs (CJSJ). I am a resident of MD District 11. I am testifying **in support of Senate Bill 178**.



Senate Bill 178 which will reform the Maryland Public Information Act to allow details of the investigations of police misconduct to be disclosed. I request that you commit to reforming the MPIA because police accountability on a local level is impossible without it.

Currently, police misconduct investigations are considered "personnel records" and thus are not available for request under the Public Information Act. Passage of this policy will change this definition, resulting in an increase in police accountability, by ensuring victims and the media can get the details of how an investigation of complaints of police misconduct was handled. Additionally, it is imperative this legislation includes both sustained and unsustained cases, so citizens can get a full picture of an officer's history.

Police need community oversight. Secrecy undermines community trust in police, at a time when police departments should be mending and improving their relationships with the communities they are sworn to protect. If police departments are investigating officer misconduct thoroughly, there should be nothing to hide.

Reforming the MPIA would allow police departments to consider everyone's privacy — including officers and residents — before releasing any information. Also, it's vital that unsustained complaints are covered, since they comprise the vast majority (90%) of investigations. Investigations that are slow-walked, biased, and half-hearted will be unsustained — that's what communities need the most oversight over.

Maryland ranks among the least transparent states with regard to police misconduct complaints. Twenty-nine other states make disclosure of complaint files more accessible to the public.

It is for these reasons that I am encouraging you to vote in support of Senate Bill 178 to reform the Maryland Public Information Act.

I appreciate your time, service, and consideration. Thank you for your leadership and willingness to make the bold changes that meet this moment!

Sincerely,

**Benjamin Fertig, Ph.D.**

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