

February 4, 2021

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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB626/HB139
Law Enforcement Officers - Use of Force

TO: Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Rebecca Goldfinger, on behalf of Jews United for Justice (JUFJ)

My name is Rebecca Goldfinger. I live in Silver Spring in District 20. I am submitting this testimony on behalf of Jews United for Justice in support of SB626/HB139, Law Enforcement Officers - Use of Force. JUFJ organizes more than 5,500 Jewish Marylanders and allies in support of local and state campaigns for social, racial, and economic justice.

According to Jewish tradition, if someone saves a life, it is as though she has saved the entire world. And if someone destroys a life, it is as though she has destroyed the entire world.

A recent article by Lynn Peeples in the journal *Nature* indicated that "about 1,000 civilians are killed each year by law-enforcement officers in the United States. By one estimate, Black men are 2.5 times more likely than white men to be killed by police during their lifetime. And in another study, Black people who were fatally shot by police seemed to be twice as likely as white people to be unarmed."¹

These statistics are shocking and distressing, especially when you consider the individuals behind the statistics. Each one of those victims was a son or daughter, possibly a parent, sibling, aunt, uncle, friend. Reading about the killings of Anton Black, Robert White, and other Black people who have been murdered by law enforcement officers here in Maryland has shaken me greatly.

¹ Peeples, Lynn. "What the data say about police brutality and racial bias — and which reforms might work." *Nature*. June 19, 2020. <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-01846-z>.

As I white person, I am distressed that my Black friends and neighbors live with a fear of police that I am unencumbered by. Black people are at greater risk of suffering police violence than I am, simply because of their physical appearance. This is absolutely appalling and I am moved by Leviticus 19:16, which says, "Do not stand idly by while your neighbor's blood is shed." That's why I am urging you to support SB626/HB139 - it will save lives.

One way to stem this tide of police violence is to place limitations on the use of force by law enforcement officers. I believe it is critical that police use lethal force only when their lives or the lives of others are in imminent danger, and every other option has been exhausted. Law enforcement officers need better training in de-escalation, and they need to face consequences if they fail to limit their use of force appropriately.

I believe that there are many actions we can take as a society to stop taking the lives - and thus the entire world - of people of color. I view passing SB626/HB139 as one of those actions, and I, on behalf of JUFJ, respectfully urge you to return a favorable report on SB626/HB139. Thank you very much for your consideration.