



TESTIMONY FOR SB0626 LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS – USE OF FORCE

Bill Sponsor: Senator Carter

Committee: Judicial Proceedings

Organization Submitting: Maryland Legislative Coalition

Person Submitting: Cecilia Plante, co-chair

Position: FAVORABLE

I am submitting this testimony in favor of HB0139 on behalf of the Maryland Legislative Coalition. The Maryland Legislative Coalition is an association of activists - individuals and grassroots groups in every district in the state. We are unpaid citizen lobbyists and our Coalition supports well over 30,000 members.

Our Coalition members support efforts to rethink how force is used by police officers against members of the public. While we understand and appreciate that officers are often placed in difficult situations, we have seen way too much violence against unarmed or vulnerable people that is not in any way required by the situation.

As Maryland is one of only nine states without a Use of Force law, we feel that the measures taken by this bill are necessary and useful to both the public and the police. The bill specifies that use of force is a last resort, after all other measures, like verbal communications, warnings, physical distance and de-escalation tactics have proven unsuccessful and is only to be used until the person is under the officer's control and does not pose a threat to anyone. It also specifies the definition of use of force and the types of force that are not allowed, such as –

- Discharge of a firearm
- Strikes to the head, neck, sternum, spine or groin
- Strikes to the throat or chokeholds
- Hitting a person's head against a hard object, such as a wall
- Any maneuver that restricts blood flow to the brain

It is the use of extreme force that has caused the tragedies that we have seen in the news, and many other tragedies that we have not. Adopting these measures would engender more trust between the public and the police, trust that is crucial to maintaining safe communities.

We are also heartened by the fact that there are consequences built into the bill. Too often, there are requirements, but no real teeth. In this case, funding is cut off if law enforcement organizations don't adopt these practices, and officers who violate these practices may be charged with manslaughter or murder, if their actions result in death, or with reckless endangerment, if their actions do not.

There have been too many injuries, and even deaths, by police against often unarmed and harmless residents. Policing organizations must stand up and admit that they have allowed officers too much free reign and have shielded those who have violated the public's trust. It is more than time for accountability. This bill supplies some solid, well measured steps in making policing organizations, and police officers more accountable for actions that are not representative of good policing.

We support this bill and recommend a **FAVORABLE** report in committee.