

**Testimony for the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
February 9, 2021**

HB 139 – Law Enforcement Officers -- Use of Force

FAVORABLE

To Chairman Clippinger, Vice Chair Atterbeary, and Committee members,

My name is Onyinye Alheri and I live in Baltimore, Maryland, in the 40th Legislative district. I am writing in support of HB 139 on Use of Force.

Maryland’s lack of statutory limits on use of force, and the Supreme Court’s failure to protect the lives and safety of Maryland residents has resulted in horrible harms by police officers. These harms, including physical injury, mental trauma and loss of life, are often enacted upon black and brown bodies, migrants, trans and queer people, and those deemed as “other”, “dangerous” or “unworthy”. As an abolitionist, I envision and am actively committed toward a world without police. The institution of policing is rooted in anti-blackness and was created to control the bodies and behaviors of those who do not adhere to Eurocentric ways of being. It has been proven time and time again that not only does policing not protect us, but that some police officers are seeking to harm us under the false guise of public order and safety.

It is not enough to codify *Graham* and *Garner* into state law, we must elevate the “objectively reasonable” standard so that officers can not continue to use force in interactions with residents, in the situations where they are present. There are other necessary components to addressing use of force by police officers, but this is a start. Failing to change the legal standard will maintain the status quo and let officers remain unaccountable for the harm they cause. The summer of 2020 should have been more than enough evidence that the people are ready for alternatives to policing.

Now is the time for a statewide use of force standard that holds officers accountable and ensures that officers do not continue to kill us. I urge a favorable vote on HB 139.

Adelante,
Onyinye Alheri