



Testimony in SUPPORT of HB139
Law Enforcement Officers - Use of Force
Lydia Walther-Rodriguez, On Behalf of CASA
House Judiciary Committee

February 5, 2021

Dear Honorable Chairman Clippinger, Honorable Vice-Chair Atterbeary, and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

CASA is pleased to provide favorable testimony in support of **HB139, Law Enforcement Officers - Use of Force**. CASA is the largest immigrant advocacy and services organization in the state of Maryland and in the Mid-Atlantic region, representing over 100,000 Black and Brown immigrants and working families. Our offices provide a variety of different services including ESOL classes, citizenship preparation, tax preparations, health navigation, and education, workforce development, legal services, and more. Our membership, who is disproportionately impacted in comparison to their white counterparts, has consistently been before the committee testifying to their personal accounts of police misconduct, abuse, and brutality.

CASA is deeply concerned that our state does not have statutory limits on police officer's use of force. With Maryland being only one of the nine states without a use of force law, we are left with two supreme court cases that do not do the job of protecting Marylanders from police violence. Instead of codifying Graham and Garner into state law, we believe that the standard for use of force much is significantly raised. An officer should only be permitted to use force if it is absolutely necessary and when all other options have been exhausted.

Members of CASA who will testify before the committee for the hearing of this bill will attest to their own experiences of being brutalized by the police without any attempts to de-escalate the situation, provide warning or use other options before resorting to force. Interactions like this, in addition to being detrimental physically, have left Black and Brown members of our community with long-lasting distrust of the police and long-lasting negative effects on their mental health. The unacceptable experiences of CASA members and Black and Brown people, who have brutalized by the police must end. We believe that HB139 accomplishes the goal of having a clear definition of lethal and non-lethal force, establishing that an officer may only use less than lethal force when it's absolutely necessary and proportionate to the goal, ensuring and officers must warn, attempt to de-escalate, and intervene with other officers who are using excessive force, and more. Most importantly, this changes officers' behavior in a way that protects human life.

CASA is also an active member of the Maryland Coalition for Justice and Police Accountability (MCJPA), a statewide coalition of over 90 organizations united to achieve meaningful police reform in Maryland - and includes individuals and family members who have been impacted by police violence, civil rights activists, religious leaders, legal experts advocacy groups, and more. Our organizations are united behind five critical policy reforms, including the complete establishment of a use of force policy in Maryland.

Maryland must end police violence and abuse that disproportionately impacts Black and Latinx Marylanders. The time is far overdue to hold officers accountable for using excessive force. For the reasons stated above, **CASA strongly urges a favorable report on HB139.**

Lydia Walther-Rodriguez
Baltimore & Central Maryland Region Director, CASA