



Many struggles, one mission.

Testimony SUPPORTING HB336

February 18, 2021

Dear members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Abby Cocke and I am a resident of Baltimore City in District 43 and a strong supporter of HB336. On behalf of Baltimore for Border Justice, a local advocacy and aid organization, I am submitting this testimony to urge you to SUPPORT HB0336, *Private Institutions of Higher Education - Police Departments - Repeal and Prohibition*.

When our communities are over-policed, it draws stark borders between who may move freely and who is targeted. Private, armed university police create a hostile environment for students and staff of color, as well as for residents of surrounding communities. At a time when we are striving so hard to create greater transparency and accountability in policing, allowing for private police forces that are not accountable to the public is a step in the wrong direction.

Take the proposed private Johns Hopkins University police force, the authorization for which would be repealed as part of this bill. It is not supported by students, staff, or community members in surrounding neighborhoods, because we know that it will expand and empower a violent system that already targets and disproportionately harms immigrants, people of color, gender and sexual minorities, the homeless, the disabled and neuro-atypical, and anyone else who doesn't fit in. In a poll filled out by more than a third of under-graduates, fully 75% were opposed. Over 300 staff members, dozens of professional organizations, and thousands of students, alumni, and residents, have signed a petition in opposition. A month-long sit-in against the plan drew broad participation and formal support from the school's own Student Government Association. How can this plan carry forward with any legitimacy, when those affected are so unified in their rejection of it?

Amongst our members and our friends, we have people who have been baselessly harassed and attacked on their own blocks by existing Hopkins security, well outside of the Hopkins campuses and while in no way posing any disturbance or threat. We also have people who are passionately opposed because of their own knowledge of the brutality of the existing police forces in Baltimore, of the ways these forces move around like predator priests being assigned new parishes, and of the ways that JHU President Ron Daniels his backers disdain our voices and safety already. The sit-in itself was attacked by a white supremacist teacher and Hopkins security failed to intervene, as outlined in the damning fact-finding report commissioned afterwards by the university (<https://facultyassembly.jhu.edu/files/2019/12/Homewood-Faculty-Assembly-Fact-Finding-Committee-Report.pdf>, page 29), drawing further grave concerns about the idea that Hopkins needs more security to care for its students and community.

For an account in favor of this legislation from a very different perspective, read the words of Baltimore Police Department veteran Larry Smith, who lays out the case against the specific officers already involved with Hopkins security, with the process that got us here, and with similar models across the country and locally that have caused deaths rather than preventing them: <https://theappeal.org/johns-hopkins-universitys-private-police-force-will-bring-more-cops-to-an-overpoliced-baltimore>. So, for Baltimore, and for the whole state, we ask you – pass HB0336 and move us away from private entities having their own armed police forces! Thank you for your attention and for doing the right thing.

Sincerely,

Abby Cocke

Co-founder, Baltimore for Border Justice

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