

Oppose-HB336- Private Institutions of Higher Education - Police Departments - Repeal and Prohibition

February 23, 2021

My name is Leon Purnell. For more than 20 years I have served as the executive director of the Men and Families Center in East Baltimore, formerly known as the Men's Center. I've lived in Baltimore my whole life, and I know firsthand the challenges our city and its residents face from violent crime. I fully support the development of the Johns Hopkins Police Department.

I am testifying today against HB336- Private Institutions of Higher Education - Police Departments - Repeal and Prohibition. This legislation would take away the chance for a future Johns Hopkins Police Department before they even had the chance to get it off the ground.

As I said two years ago when I spoke in support of the Community Safety and Strengthening Act, we should all put ourselves in the shoes of a parent of a Hopkins student going to class, or a nurse going to work at the hospital, or a patient seeking care at their hospitals. I believe that even more today, as we see our front-line workers put their lives at risk day-in and day-out, working in hospitals and in the community.

Given the tragic levels of violence in our city, how could they not be worried? Every day violence touches our lives in new and terrible ways: at churches, in schools, and on neighborhood streets and parks. Why shouldn't Hopkins take steps to protect its campuses and community?

I attended some of the many community meetings and forums Johns Hopkins held on this issue. And I was pleased that Hopkins listened to its neighbors like me, as the final legislation directly addressed the concerns raised by the community. We knew then with all of the requirements in the legislation around community input, officer training, reporting, and local hiring, that it would take time to build this police department, one that was truly progressive and accountable to the community. But, I am confident that if we give them the time, Johns Hopkins will continue to listen to our neighborhoods and communities and set the highest standards for training, conduct, and accountability.

Everyone agrees that more must be done to stop the violence, and this law represents the hopes and hard work of many of us who live and work in this city. I strongly urge this committee to vote no on this bill.

Thank you.