

Testimony in SUPPORT of HB 139

Law Enforcement Officers – Use of Force

Maryland Coalition for Justice and Police Accountability

February 9, 2021

Dear Honorable Chairman Clippinger, and Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

The Maryland Coalition for Justice and Police Accountability (MCJPA) is pleased to provide favorable testimony in support of **HB 139, Law Enforcement Officers – Use of Force**, to establish in Maryland a statewide use of force statute for law enforcement officers. MCJPA is 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, as well as civil rights activists, legal experts, religious leaders, and advocacy groups.

As you know, Maryland is one of only nine states without statutory limits on use of force, and Supreme Court case law fails to protect the lives and safety of Maryland residents. HB 139 includes many of the recommendations of the House Workgroup to Address Police Reform and Accountability in Maryland. However, without elevating the legal standard for use of force, Maryland will maintain the status quo. Instead of merely codifying the “objectively reasonable” standard of *Graham v. Connor*,¹ HB 139 raises this standard so that officers may only use force when it is necessary, as a last resort, after exhausting reasonable alternatives, which is judged by the totality of the circumstances.

Our coalition strongly believes that it is precisely because law enforcement officers have so much power over the people they serve – to legally kill them – that there must be meaningful accountability when they use unnecessary force.

We stand with the families of Anton Black, Korryn Gaines, William Green, Leonard Shand, and so many other Black Marylanders who have been killed by police officers in Maryland, and whose loved ones come before this committee year after year, pleading for meaningful change. Despite the best efforts of many members of this committee, real change has yet to come.

HB 139 will finally hold officers and agencies accountable for unnecessary and excessive force, and start to change the culture of policing so that officers serve communities to uphold Constitutional rights, and preserve every human life. Maryland must do more to keep our residents safe, and the General Assembly has the obligation to act boldly, and ensure that law enforcement officers and agencies are meaningfully held accountable.

The Maryland Coalition for Justice and Police Accountability urges a favorable report on HB 139.

Respectfully,

Maryland Coalition for Justice and Police Accountability

**See the full list of coalition membership attached.*

¹ 490 U.S. 386 (1989).

Advocates for Children and Youth
ACLU of Maryland
ACLU of Maryland, Montgomery County Chapter
Amnesty International
Arts Education in Maryland Schools Alliance (AEMS)
Baltimore Action Legal Team
Baltimore Bern Unit
Baltimore City Civilian Review Board
Baltimore City Democratic Socialists of America
Baltimore for Border Justice
Be More Unified
Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) Office in Maryland
CASA
Caucus of African-Americans Leaders
Citizens Policing Project
Coalition for Justice for Anton Black
Coalition of Concerned Mothers
Coalition of People Opposed to Violence and Extremism
Common Cause Maryland
Community Actively Seeking (C.A.S.T.)
Community Justice
Disability Rights Maryland
Do the Most Good
Drug Policy Alliance
Equity Matters
For Kathy's Sake
FreeState Justice
Greater Baltimore Democratic Socialists of America - Steering Committee
Greenbelt People Power
Hispanic National Law Enforcement Association
Homeless Persons Representation Project
Innocence Project
InterFaith Action for Human Rights
Jews United For Justice
Job Opportunities Task Force
Justice for Tyrone West Coalition
Justice Policy Institute
Kevin L. Cooper Foundation
Law Enforcement Action Partnership
Leaders of a Beautiful Struggle
League of Women Voters Maryland
LGBTQ Dignity Project
Life After Release
Making Changes
Mama Sisterhood of Prince George's County
March for Our Lives Maryland
Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform
Maryland Center on Economic Policy
Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition
Maryland Defenders Union

Maryland Justice Project
Maryland Office of the Public Defender
Maryland Poor People's Campaign
Maryland Prisoners' Rights Coalition
Maryland Restorative Justice Initiative
Maryland State Conference of NAACP Branches
Marylanders to Prevent Gun Violence
Moms Demand Action
Montgomery County Civil Rights Coalition
Montgomery County Democratic Socialists of America
Mothers on the Move
NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland
NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund
National Coalition for Drug Legalization
Nigerian American Lawyers Association - Washington DC Chapter
Organizing Black
Our Maryland
Our Prince George's
Our Revolution Maryland
Out For Justice
Planned Parenthood of Maryland
Power Inside
Prevent Gun Violence Ministry, River Road Unitarian Universalist Congregation
Prince George's County Branch of Democratic Socialists of America
Prince George's People's Coalition
Prisons to Professionals
Progressive Maryland
Public Justice Center
Racial Justice NOW!
Rebuild, Overcome, and Rise (ROAR) Center at UMB
Reproductive Justice Inside
Sanctuary DMV
SEIU 1199
Showing up for Racial Justice Annapolis and Anne Arundel County (SURJ3A)
Showing Up for Racial Justice, Baltimore
Showing Up for Racial Justice, Montgomery County
Sierra Club Maryland Chapter
Silver Spring Justice Coalition
St. Ignatius Catholic Church, Justice & Peace Committee
Takoma Park Mobilization
The JustUs Initiative
Wicomico County NAACP Branch 7028
Women's Law Center
Young People for Progress