

Johns Hopkins Graduate Representative Organization HB0336 MD District 43

The following statement in support of stripping Johns Hopkins University of the ability to form a private police force was approved by the Graduate Representative Organization at JHU in June 2020. It is being submitted for testimony to the Maryland Assembly pursuant to a further vote of the GRO General Council to involve itself in supporting HB0336. The GRO supports HB0336.

Dear Homewood Graduate Students,

On June 12th, Johns Hopkins President Ron Daniels, Johns Hopkins Hospital President Kevin Sowers, and Dean of the Medical Faculty Paul Rothman announced a two-year pause on implementation of the Johns Hopkins Police Department. The context for this announcement is unmistakable: there is currently a massive national upheaval over the extent of police powers and the long line of police killings of Black people and people of color more broadly in this country. While we appreciate the leadership of JHU acknowledging the political moment, a pause on the implementation of JHPD does not go far enough. **The GRO opposes any implementation of a JHPD and calls on Johns Hopkins to abandon its pursuit of a private police force once and for all.**

JHU's ambition to start a JHPD has been marked by a singular focus on lobbying Maryland and Baltimore officials, while spurring vociferous protest and opposition from students, faculty, and community members, culminating in a month-long sit-in and occupation of Garland Hall last year. Widely publicized community engagement efforts did not seem to meaningfully shift the University's approach in any way, and appeared to be more of an attempt at selling an already decided program rather than good-faith engagement in understanding the concerns of people opposed to the private police force. While putting a pause on implementing the police force is a necessary first step, Johns Hopkins has so far not shown a meaningful capacity for community engagement or listening to input from various stakeholders at our university, and it is difficult to imagine Johns Hopkins dramatically improving these practices during the two-year pause. Another two years of the same inadequate channels for public discussion and continued disregard of dissenting viewpoints will only exacerbate concerns and mistrust of JHPD and Johns Hopkins more generally.

At this crucial historical juncture, Johns Hopkins has recognized that the prevailing winds are not in its favor for developing a private police force. What happens now that the two-year pause has been announced will define Johns Hopkins as an institution and how it understands its role in Baltimore's civic life. Either this pause will be used to try to generate better PR for an already decided private police force, or Johns Hopkins will do the right thing and abandon these plans altogether. A two-year pause will not allow Johns Hopkins to somehow invent technical fixes to the endemic and persistent problems with policing in this country. It will not undo past disregard of dissenting Black and minority voices across the University. It will not give the University time to restore decades of broken trust with its neighbors. If Johns Hopkins is to live up to the ideals it espouses, it must cease its efforts to develop a private police force and envision new ways of giving back to the Baltimore community it depends on. While far

from an exhaustive list, these efforts could include: donating funds originally intended for the police department to YouthWorks and other programs to support the community and youth of Baltimore; expanding resources for offices and departments that focus on diversity, inclusion, and supporting minorities on campus; and engaging in open-minded discussion with students, faculty, staff, and community members about fair and equitable campus safety programs.

Sincerely, The GRO