

Dear Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

This testimony is being submitted by Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore, a group of individuals working to move white folks as part of a multi-racial movement for equity and racial justice in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Howard County. We are also working in collaboration with Campaign for Safety, Justice, and Jobs and CASA de Maryland. I am a resident of MD District 41 in the Roland Park neighborhood of Baltimore City. **I am testifying in support of House Bill 429.**



This bill will require that all law enforcement officers who carry a firearm also wear a body camera, even if they are in plain clothes and not in uniform.

Current law will require all law enforcement officers that “regularly interact with members of the public as part of the law enforcement officers official duties” to wear body cameras; however, the generality of this description can leave a lot of room for interpretation. This bill makes it clear as day. If someone is carrying a gun, they have the ability to kill someone, and if they are doing so under the auspices of the state, their actions should be as transparent as reasonably possible.

Montgomery County resident Kwamena Ocran was only 24 years old when he was shot 8 times by Gaithersburg police officers, including twice in the back. Law enforcement officers stated that they had seen a muzzle flash before they shot Kwamena, but they were unable to find shell casings from any guns but those of the officers. They also failed to swab Kwamena’s hands for gunshot residue analysis. As a result, there is no evidence that Kwamena shot at the officers before they killed him (source: [The Guardian, 10/11/21](#)). This leaves members of the community with little trust for law enforcement, because there is no transparency about what happened immediately before Kwamena was killed. In cases like this, the availability of body camera evidence could restore community relations by either exonerating the officers involved or ensuring they be held accountable for their actions.

Law enforcement officers have a responsibility to the communities they serve to uphold the law, but they also have an even more important duty to protect individuals within the community. In order to meet those responsibilities, there are certain limited circumstances in which law enforcement officers are allowed to use force. Especially in cases like that of the namesake of this bill, Kwamena Ocran, when law enforcement officers kill a member of our community, the public deserves the transparency provided by body cameras to confirm that law enforcement officers’ actions were within the law. This will enable law enforcement to maintain a good relationship with community members. It will ensure that law enforcement officers are upholding the law not only for others, but in their own actions. It will allow the community to ensure that law enforcement officers treat preservation of life as their highest priority. And if law enforcement officers break the law, it will provide one more source of evidence for making sure justice is served.

It is for these reasons that I am encouraging you to vote **in support of House Bill 429.**

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,

Sarah Johnson
1 Merryman Court
Baltimore, MD 21210
Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore