

February 17, 2023

House Judiciary Committee
Del. Luke Clippinger, Chair
Room 101
House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Delegate Clippinger and Committee Members:

We are submitting this letter as written testimony **in strong support of HB0430**, the Police Immunity and Accountability bill introduced by Delegate Wilkins, in advance of your hearing on February 21.

As members of the Takoma Park Presbyterian Church and in response to our understanding of the gospel, we are active in anti-racism work including efforts to redefine public safety and transform policing. Presbyterians for Police Transformation is the body within our congregation charged with leading this aspect of our ministry. We realize that the movement for racial justice, including the much-needed transformation of policing in this country, requires a comprehensive approach. After much research, discussion, and reflection, we have chosen 7 priorities for our advocacy work in the area of police reform in Maryland. One of these priorities is the establishment of effective accountability policies and mechanisms for police officers and institutions. To that end, we are writing **in support of proposed bill HB0430**, “Police Immunity and Accountability Act.”

This bill would eliminate the use of “qualified immunity” as a way for police officers to avoid significant consequences when they violate the rights of citizens, in the state of Maryland. The principle of qualified immunity, or the idea that police officers are rightfully protected from the ramifications of unlawful acts committed in the course of their duties, has for decades prevented victims of police brutality from being compensated, and has allowed the officers perpetuating the brutality to avoid the worst consequences. Even when convicted of a crime, officers were still protected from losing employment and pension benefits as the result of violating a citizen’s civil rights.

The Maryland legislature has, in recent years, taken admirable steps towards reform that offers the potential to dismantle the systemic racism that results in disproportionate harm to people of color. The elimination of qualified immunity is a necessary step in that process. As long as qualified immunity remains a guiding principle in the way police misconduct is handled, victims of police brutality will continue to lack recourse. More importantly, the perpetuation of qualified immunity removes a disincentive for police officers to engage in misconduct when they are so inclined. Bottom line, removing qualified immunity will reduce violence against people of color at the hands of police officers.

We strongly encourage the legislature to pass HB0430.

Sincerely,

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