



Montgomery County Community Action Board Testimony
County Council Bill 27-20 – Police Regulations – Use of Force Policy
Tuesday, July 7, 2020

Good evening. My name is Zelda Wafer-Alonge and I am a member of the Community Action Board Executive Committee. As advocates for the low-income community, the Community Action Board strongly supports Bill 27-20. Community Action was created during President Johnson’s War on Poverty and grew out of the Civil Rights Movement. Our history is closely connected to the ongoing fight for racial equity, in part because we know that race and income are so often closely aligned, with a disproportionate number of Black and Hispanic community members living below the poverty line here in Montgomery County and across the country.

The Community Action Board supports this bill because we are deeply concerned that policing practices continue to disproportionately impact minority and lower-income community members. According to a 2019 study, “police-related death rates were highest in neighborhoods with the greatest concentrations of low-income residents (vs high-income residents) and residents of color (vs non-Hispanic White residents).”¹

Our Board’s advocacy focuses on policies and programs that will help lower-income community members move towards self-sufficiency. In addition to expanding programs that support the lower-income community, such as increasing affordable housing and high-quality early care and education, we believe that reforming policing practices is critical because it will do more than just address the specific interactions between police officers and community members.

Research shows that the effects of police violence spread to the entire community, resulting in many negative consequences, including reduced school attendance and increased symptoms of

¹ <https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/10.2105/AJPH.2018.304851>

depression among Black people.² Such effects can perpetuate the cycle of poverty in the most impacted communities.

While progress has been made with the County's policing practices, including the use of body cameras, recent requirements regarding equity training and policies, and passage of the LETT Act, we know that Montgomery County is not immune from the epidemic of police violence. According to a recent Washington Post article, Black people make up about 1 in 5 County residents, but in 2018, they were the targets in more than half of cases of police use of force.³ The restrictions on police use of force like the ones laid out in this bill are an important first step, but our Board strongly believes that additional training must be an essential component of long-term change. We ask the Council to explore additional training requirements for law enforcement personnel, specifically anti-racism training, training geared towards reducing implicit bias, and training focused on de-escalation techniques so that officers do not feel the need to use excessive force. We also ask the Council to consider funding to hire mental health professionals to support the officers' work in the community, providing direct assistance to those who require mental health services rather than police intervention. A police force that has a better understanding of systemic racism and how it impacts our daily lives, and is equipped with the mental health supports necessary to address individual needs, will be in a much better position to interact with our diverse community members and work with the community in a more equitable way.

The Community Action Board stands ready to work with the Council; our fellow Boards, Committees, and Commissions; DHHS colleagues; and local advocacy groups to develop and support policies that reduce disparities in the County. We thank you for your ongoing commitment to equity in Montgomery County and we look forward to continuing to work with you on these efforts.

² <https://psmag.com/news/police-are-most-likely-to-use-deadly-force-in-poorer-more-highly-segregated-neighborhoods>

³ https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/washington-region-has-problems-with-police-shootings-and-racist-practices-too/2020/06/28/c94819a8-b7dd-11ea-a8da-693df3d7674a_story.html