

Testimony of Maryland Poor People's Campaign

Bill 49-21, Enabling Legislation for Police Accountability Board and Administrative Charging Committee

January 18, 2022

My name is Steve Metalitz, I live in Silver Spring, and I am testifying on behalf of the Maryland Poor People's Campaign. Our main goal is to lift up the voices of poor and low-wealth residents in the state, and to ensure that those most impacted by government policies are at the table where those policies are set. Applying that standard to Bill 49-21, we find the legislation seriously lacking. If it is enacted in its current form, the marginalized groups most directly impacted by abusive policing --- racial minorities, youth, and the poor -- will continue to be excluded from any meaningful role in oversight of police practices and discipline.

The bill's most glaring flaw is the list of requirements for appointment to the Police Accountability Board. These requirements will make it almost impossible for community representatives of the most impacted populations to serve on this oversight body. Demanding prior experience in law enforcement management or personnel disciplinary proceedings might make sense for the Administrative Charging Committee, which recommends discipline in individual cases. But the PAB is intended to serve a broader function: to be the voice of the community in reviewing outcomes and advising the Council and Executive on policing matters generally. That is why it is critical that those County residents most at risk of police misconduct be fully represented on the PAB. The state statute requires "racial, gender and cultural diversity." The additional qualifications added by the bill should be discarded.

This change, along with many others to the make-up and powers of the PAB, is supported by the Racial Equity and Social Justice Impact Statement prepared by the Council's Office of Legislative Oversight. The Council should be guided by the OLO's recommendations.

As a white middle class resident of the County for many decades, I personally have not had to worry much about abusive police practices. We need to make sure that the PAB is not dominated by people like me, but rather by those from communities most impacted by those practices. Only a strong, diverse, and independent PAB will have the credibility to bring greater accountability to policing in our county. We urge the Council to amend this bill to achieve that. Thank you.