

MC Bill 2-24
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Opposed

My name is Amy Waychoff, and I have lived in Montgomery County since 1987. Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

The entire justification for Bill 2-24, The Freedom to Leave Act, is based on a number of false premises:

First, the bill's sponsors believe that the Montgomery County Police Department does not follow the law. They incorrectly assume that there is racial bias in traffic stop enforcement. According to Maryland law, the police are not allowed to use "an individual's race or ethnicity as the sole justification to initiate a traffic stop." If the MCPD is not following the law, file a lawsuit. You do not do so because you know that the MCPD is one of the most moral police departments in the country.

Second, the bill's sponsors assume that the aforementioned racial bias is reflected in the overuse of "consent" searches of vehicles. Nothing could be further from the truth. According to statistics provided by the MCPD to state reporting entities, "over 98% of arrests that involved a search are either probable cause searches, searches that had a warrant, or searches that were incident to the arrest of an individual." That leaves less than two percent for consent searches.

Third, the bill's sponsors insultingly assume that minorities in the county do not know their constitutional rights, nor do they know MCPD policy regarding consent searches. According to that policy, not only do our local police meet the constitutional requirement for voluntariness, but an officer is required to articulate the rationale for the search, advise the person they may refuse, and if consent is given, it must be recorded on the officer's

body worn camera and a department approved consent form must be signed by the person.

Bills such as these only serve to lower police morale further during a time of skyrocketing crime. First, let's address police morale:

— During Fiscal Year 2021, the County Council cut nearly 30 positions from the police department. As a result, realizing that the government no longer valued their service, officers began to retire in higher and higher numbers. Projections for July 2024 forecast a whopping 370 percent increase in vacancies in just two and a half years.

— Reductions in the police force inevitably lead to reductions in police service, and reductions in police service have led to the unfathomable increase in crime we see today. Two thousand and twenty-three saw a 130 percent increase in auto thefts and a 40 percent increase in carjackings.

Passage of the Freedom to Leave Act will further reinforce MCPD officers' belief that their government officials do not have their back. The most important role of government is to keep its citizens safe. Montgomery County has failed in that sacred duty. Bills such as 2-24 will only make the situation worse. Thank you.