

My name is Tim Pruss, and I am a resident of Montgomery County. This proposed legislation will have a negative impact on retaining high-quality and professional police officers. Multiple studies show that when police reduce discretionary enforcement during traffic stops, violent crime goes up. Ensuring that individuals are aware of their rights during interactions with law enforcement is a more effective solution than limiting officers' abilities to effectively do their jobs. Thus, I am against *Bill 2-24, Freedom to Leave Act*. Consent searches are an important tool for police to address serious crime.

The spirit of the bill is that people don't trust the police, who they believe are too biased to fairly do their job. However, there is little to no data supporting such a claim regarding our police here in Montgomery County. In fact, in a 2022 report, Effective Law Enforcement for All (ELEFA) reviewed 50 Body-Worn Camera traffic stop incidents over a 3-year period. These incidents were randomly selected and included incidents from all 6 District stations. ELEFA believes that overall MCPD police officers handle traffic stops professionally. There were very few traffic stops observed that were concerning or would fail to meet ELEFA's standards for professional behavior. ELEFA concluded that no observed racial bias occurred in the 50 traffic stops with Body-Worn Camera incidents reviewed.

Furthermore, besides Body-Worn Cameras, Police in this county have a robust complaint-against-police system, and an alphabet soup of civilian accountability entities, so there are ways to substantiate or refute a complaint that an officer behaved improperly or unprofessionally. For the purposes of anyone who may have a complaint, moreover, we have the Internal Affairs Division at MCPD.

Police already train officers to complete the traffic stop by handing back the license and registration card to the driver prior to asking for consent to search a vehicle. If police held onto the documents, then a person pulled over would not feel free to leave and the consent would not be truly voluntary. This was affirmed by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1996.

This Council has been briefed regularly on the Department's staffing challenges. MCPD currently has 176 vacancies, not including 27 recruits in the current Academy Class. The Department's attrition projections, which remain on target, estimate the Department will have up to 216 vacancies by July 2024 and 239 by July 2025. Implementing this *bill* will further erode morale and impact both recruiting and retention.

Instead of just continuing with \$20,000 signing bonuses to entice recruits, please continue to offer them a Council, who robustly supports, encourages respect, and enables officers to do their jobs as well as they provide for our community.

It's important to consider the broader implications of legislative changes on public safety. Instead of eroding the confidence of our officers, provide public education through social media or similar means so that individuals are aware of their rights during interactions with law enforcement. It makes sense for people to feel they have a voice and that their rights are protected rather than enacting laws that weaken our police force. Educating the population is a more effective solution than limiting officers' ability to effectively their jobs.

For these reasons, I urge the Council to reject *Bill 2-24*.

Respectfully,

Tim Pruss  
Montgomery County Citizen  
tim.pruss@mydrone.pro