

Montgomery County Councilmembers,

I would like to offer my full support for Councilmember Jawando's Freedom to Leave Act (Bill 2-24). This bill is one small step in a broader struggle toward redefining and reworking the imbalanced power structures that play such a massive role in our lives. In order to rethink our relationship with policing and power in general, we need to be honest about the roles they play in our communities.

As currently constituted, police do not serve the interests of the people. Policing serves the interest of capital. Police do not defend people; they defend money and property. Opposition to the common sense limiting of the police's ability to conduct warrantless 'consent' searches is yet another way that policing desensitizes us to abusive authority. There can be no proper consent to a search if the ensuing response is likely to be violence of some kind. Whether that be illegal detainment, officer-led escalation, or physical violence.

I fear such deference to the morality of police sets a dangerous precedent, and already has. Police hold a uniquely powerful place in our societal structure, and their opposition to such a bill is a telling moment of clarity for an otherwise obtuse, abusive institution. Reducing their ability to conduct warrantless searches impedes their ability to carry out wonton violence; it disrupts the King's ability to treat their subjects however they please, with no accountability. This is the desired effect of accountability measures. Police unions being universally opposed to even the most tepid reform shows not that this is bad policy, but that they are acutely aware that the positions they hold are only effective because of the threat of violence, warrantless searches, and property seizure. Without the use of force propping up police violence, they're little more than overpaid bureaucrats with guns.

Black drivers made up 30% of all traffic stops in the county from FY18-22, despite making up 18% of the county's population. 'Consent' searches are often anything but consensual, as police often respond with intimidation and threats when met with anything but deference. Furthermore, these warrantless searches don't work, only yielding contraband in .5% of total searches conducted in Montgomery County.

Passing this legislation takes courage, and a commitment that this is not the end of holding police accountable, only the beginning. It's a necessary step to take to curb unnecessary intrusion into our lives, and to limit the hold that policing has over so many people. Thank you for your courage, and for standing in the face of institutional violence and those that do its bidding.

Zach Wood  
Montgomery County Resident