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On Behalf of the Silver Spring Justice Coalition

**Testimony in Opposition to Bill 17-21 - Community Informed Police Training**

The Spring Spring Justice Coalition (SSJC) is a coalition of community members, faith groups, and civil and human rights organizations from throughout Montgomery County. We envision a state and county where community and individual needs for safety are met while harm by police is eliminated. SSJC opposes Bill 17-21, Community Informed Police Training.

We understand that the Bill will:

1. Require the Montgomery County Police Department (MCPD) to collaborate with local educational institutions to recruit cadets who reflect the community's diversity.
2. Require 30 hrs of training in "community service and social justice"<sup>1</sup> before acceptance to the police academy. Performance in the training would become part of the application process for the academy.
3. Require MCPD to collaborate and partner with local educational institutions for an unspecified amount of continuing education on related subject areas, including racial equity and social justice.

**SSJC opposes this Bill because there is no evidence that the type of training required by this Bill will lead to a reduction in harm caused by policing or to more racially equitable policing. Instead, SSJC favors spending County resources on non-policing efforts to reduce harms caused by police and improve safety and health outcomes for County residents.<sup>2,3</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Topics include racial equity and social justice; health and wellness; community policing; policing history; active listening and conflict resolution; and civic engagement.

<sup>2</sup> The bill does not mention how the training would be funded. We have been informed that the bill is intended to be revenue neutral. Even if funding is provided from the existing police budget, such a re-allocation does not meet the community's priorities. SSJC recommends a higher priority on existing funding to be re-allocated to data collection, more robust discipline, and training on changing the rules around how police interact with members of the public such as use of force protocols.

<sup>3</sup>The bill's requirement to reform recruitment to reflect the diversity of the community is not the subject of SSJC's opposition.

While SSJC believes that reducing contact between police and vulnerable community members is the best way to reduce harm, the little evidence that does support investment in training has a different focus from that contained in Bill 17-21: a combination of changing the rules around how police interact with members of the public and training officers in those rules. For example, a study in Seattle demonstrated that “a relatively minor supervisory intervention may cause substantive changes in how police and citizens interact with each other,” when officers receive training in procedurally just policing it can lead to a reduction in use of force of between 15% and 40%, depending on the situation.<sup>4</sup> That same study found that the procedurally just policing training did not impact community engagement.

In contrast, current literature and research reveals almost no evidence to support training to eliminate implicit bias<sup>5</sup> and change police culture through history and theories relating to equity, justice, and community engagement. As the County Executive’s Task Force on Reimagining Public Safety noted, “it is not enough to address bias ‘like a bad habit that can be broken.’”<sup>6</sup> (p. 59)

The Reimagining Public Safety Task Force report contains a number of other findings and recommendations that support SSJC’s position and suggest that Bill 17-21 will not move the County in the direction the community wants it to go.

- **Summary of Key Recommendations** - The Task Force recommends MCPD to seek out or develop a police training model that prioritizes problem-solving, crisis intervention, mediation and basic mental health triage as its core competencies. (Pg. 12). The type of training envisioned by Bill 17-21, does not fall within that scope. In addition, training is not mentioned at all in the Key Recommendation’s discussion of changing police culture. (Pg. 13).
- **Budget and Structure Recommendations** - In the Budget and Structure group’s discussion of how to reduce the use of force, the report notes that many training-related reforms are not evidence based and that, “[d]iversity or sensitivity training has not been shown to reduce use of force incidents, and in any case is already administered to all MCPD officers every three years, a process that has not reduced the number of racial bias cases.” (Pg. 24).

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<sup>4</sup> E. Owens et al., “Can you build a better cop?” *Criminology & Public Policy* (2018), Vol. 17, No. 1.

<sup>5</sup> “Training programs on implicit bias ... typically mix instruction, discussion and role-playing, [and] aim to help agencies reduce high-discretion policing and hold officers accountable for biased practices. But there’s no standardized curriculum—and experts say more research is needed to determine whether implicit bias training has a lasting impact and how such training can work alongside other agency reform efforts.” Zara Abrams, “What works to reduce police brutality,” *APA Monitor on Psychology* (October 1, 2020), Vol. 51, No. 7.

<sup>6</sup> The Task Force cites to the Federal Judicial Center, [Federal and State Court Cooperation: Effectiveness of Implicit Bias Trainings](#), which highlights research findings that suggest that “changing social environments may be more effective in reducing discrimination than attempting to change individual attitudes within a setting.” We interpret this to mean that it is more important to shift responsibilities away from law enforcement to other agencies or to change daily law enforcement practices through appropriate supervision.

- **Policing Program Recommendations** - Not one of the recommendations of this Taskforce focus group includes the type of racial bias, equity, history, and social justice training contemplated by this bill. The report notes the following:

... there is little if any data supporting the success of attempts to change qpolicing culture or reduce harms via training despite how attractive those approaches are; as has been reported multiple times since George Floyd's killing, the Minneapolis Police Dept. had some of the best training in the country. Members of the focus group understand that there is a key challenge in seeking to address the issue of culture directly, and also training, because there was no data supporting the benefits of spending time and resources on culture and training in reducing harms caused by policing.

In addition, the Office of Legislative Oversight's Racial Equity and Social Justice Impact Statement for Bill 17-21 concluded that the bill is only likely to favorably impact racial equity and social justice if the bill is "executed as planned" *and* results in the intended "improvements in community policing practices among new and existing MCPD personnel." However, the RESJ Statement also concludes that, "there are few rigorous research studies that assess the impact of community policing training on police officer performance." The Statement goes on to note that, "[t]he general training literature . . . suggests that training can, "have positive impacts on learning, attitudes, and behavior, although impacts in general tend to be more pronounced on attitudes and knowledge than behavior." Thus, the RESJ statement acknowledges the absence of any evidence that the intended results of Bill 17-21 will actually come to pass.

Until there is sufficient evidence to support the conclusion that the type of training required by this bill will decrease harms caused by the police, SSJC cannot support it. Choosing to put any funding, even funding currently in the policing budget, towards training that does not reduce harm, deprives our County of much-needed funding in other areas that are known to decrease harm to our most vulnerable community members. For this reason, SSJC opposes Bill 17-21.