

Jews United for Justice (JUFJ)

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**Testimony in Opposition unless Amended to Bill 18-21
Police - Internal Affairs - Procedures and Reporting Requirements
Public Hearing June 22, 2021 - 1:30 pm**

Dear Montgomery County Councilmembers:

My name is Melissa Coretz Goemann and I am offering this testimony in opposition, unless amended, to Bill 18-21 regarding Body Worn Cameras, on behalf of Jews United for Justice (JUFJ). JUFJ represents over 2,700 Jews and allies from across Montgomery County who, based on our shared values, work to advance economic and social justice and racial equity in our local community. I am a resident of Silver Spring and have worked on juvenile justice and civil rights issues for over 15 years, currently as the Senior Policy Counsel for the National Juvenile Justice Network.

Body worn cameras (BWCs) are an important tool in uncovering police misconduct to take corrective action. An extremely disturbing incident of police officers verbally abusing and traumatizing a 5-year-old boy who had left the grounds of East Silver Elementary School recently made national news. But this horrific incident didn't come to light until one year later, when the boy's mother sued Montgomery County and local media covered the lawsuit - even the Montgomery County Council and State's Attorney were unaware of this police abuse of power.

Police abuse of residents - and especially of children - must not be allowed to happen again. We appreciate Councilmember Hucker's work to address this wrong through the proposed Bill 18-21. However, without the amendments outlined below, we are concerned that this bill will not prevent police from continuing to keep misconduct hidden from the rest of the County government and the public.

We urge you to adopt these amendments:

1) Bill 18-21 expressly limits BWCs to officers in uniform or who are prominently displaying a badge. The bill should be amended to include both plain clothes and undercover officers. This

follows the new Gaithersburg City Police Department policy, which expressly requires BWCs for undercover officers.

2) The bill contains few details regarding the random reviews of BWC footage, making it very difficult to enforce. The Office of Legislative Oversight's Racial Equity and Social Justice (RESJ) Impact Statement on this bill stresses that the random review aspect of the bill is the key provision that could help to reduce racial misconduct in local policing. It can't do this, however, unless it is easily enforceable. In addition to the need to bolster this provision, we would like to expand the random reviews of BWC footage to include officers with a history of misconduct complaints.

3) The bill should provide requirements for public reporting about misconduct investigations and release of BWC footage to victims of misconduct and to the public. The RESJ Impact Statement also recommended that civilian complainants, like police officers, be given access to BWC footage to help inform their complaints.

4) The bill should require public reporting and publishing of information about misconduct investigations to the fullest extent possible under the newly amended MPIOA.

5) The bill should contain language prohibiting collective bargaining on the substance of the bill's requirements.

6) Pursuant to the recommendation in the RESJ Impact Statement, the Council should increase citizen oversight of internal audit investigations in order to promote accountability for addressing allegations of police misconduct by implementing one of the following: a citizen review board; police review with citizen oversight; police review with a citizen-police appeal board; or an independent citizen auditor.

Our Jewish faith teaches us that "When we destroy one person, we destroy an entire universe" (Mishna Sanhedrin 4:5). We must make this bill as strong as possible to help prevent police from taking actions that can severely harm and even destroy people's lives.

Respectfully submitted,

Melissa Coretz Goemann, on behalf of Jews United for Justice