

Testimony on Expedited Bill 49-21, Police Accountability Board - Administrative Charging Committee – Established

My name is Ilhan Cagri and I am testifying on behalf of the Muslim Voices Coalition, a coalition of individuals and organizations belonging to the Muslim faith who envision a county where every individual can thrive and develop to his fullest potential. We oppose this bill, unless it is significantly amended to reflect the full range of affected communities and fully empowers the Police Accountability Board. The American Muslim community represents an intersectionality of backgrounds and races. Specifically, members often suffer discrimination because of their color, ethnicity, religious affiliation, and the perception that they are “foreign”, suspect, and/or have illegal immigrant status. This otherizing view of the Muslims in our county (as well as South Asians and anyone who presents as Muslim) permeates interactions between law enforcement and community members. It is thus important to our community that Bill 49-21 fulfill its goals of enlisting a broad range of impacted communities to oversee that justice is done when civilians are harmed by police and helping to improve policing across the County by serving on the Police Accountability Board.

Because this Bill was drafted without any community input, without hearing the voices and experiences of those communities most impacted by police and police abuses, we urge you to re-design this flawed Bill from the ground up.

For example, the requirements stipulated for board membership makes it police-centric. Not only does this criteria perpetuate the status quo for police discipline in Montgomery County, it also conflicts with the intent of the HB 670. Although the MPAA does not go so far as to provide enforceable civilian oversight of policing, it did establish the PAB, an oversight board populated by members of the community. The intent was to ensure true community involvement in the disciplinary process. The criteria for board membership must be such that it ensures diversity in background and experience. The PAB must be structured so that the rights and voices of the most vulnerable are heard and protected.

Also, the County Attorney cannot serve as PAB counsel while at the same time representing the MCPD and the County. The PAB must have its own, independent counsel and staff in order to conduct the responsibilities delegated to it by the MPAA, free of conflict of interest.

At a time when police interactions with minorities and people suffering from mental illness have been shown to be deeply flawed and have even resulted in killings by police, we look to the County Council to pass a bill that will create strong community participation in and oversight of policing.

Thank you.

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