

Testimony for Strengthening Bill 49-21

I am Jim Henkelman-Bahn from Christ Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, and a member of its Racial Justice Circle. Our Racial Justice Circle wants Bill 49-21 to establish a Police Accountability Board (PAB) strengthened by amendments.

Our church became interested in police accountability and transparency in 2019 when Robert White was senselessly killed in the neighborhood of our church, which is also the place where he and his parent owned a home and lived peacefully. Robert White was walking, unarmed, through his own neighborhood where he was profiled, confronted, followed, and finally shot and killed by a Montgomery County police officer. Essentially he was shot for walking while Black. Unjustified killing of Black men by police in Montgomery County has continued with no convictions. More accountability is needed.

In the 2021 Maryland Legislative Session, The Maryland Police Accountability Act was passed to provide for more accountability. We do not think that Bill 49-21, which is intended to implement the state law, reflects the needs of the community. We were disappointed that Bill 49-21 was drafted without community input.

The bill requires members of the board to have experience in one or more of the following areas:

- 1) Managing or evaluating the management of law enforcement agency;
- 2) Evaluating citizen complaints against police officers; and
- 3) Personnel disciplinary proceedings as a manager, employee representative, mediator or arbitrator.

These criteria perpetuate the status quo for police discipline in Montgomery County. The bill's membership requirements will lead to a Police Accountability Board that looks exactly like our current MCPD Hearing Board and makes it almost impossible for people outside of law enforcement to serve on the PAB, excluding those very communities who have suffered the brunt of bad policing.

The exclusion of community members, particularly from the PAB, conflicts with the intent of the new state law.

Bill 49-21 needs to be amended to include a broader representation of Montgomery County on the PAB.

Submitted by

Jim Henkelman-Bahn
Racial Justice Circle
Christ Congregational Church, United Church of Christ
9525 Colesville Road
Silver Spring, MD 20901

5 January 2022