

My name is Sesen Berhe, I live in Montgomery County and I am a resident of District 5.

I oppose MC Bill 49-21 (Enabling Legislation for Police Accountability Board and Administrative Charging Committee)

On May 7, 2020, my brother Finan Berhe was killed while having a mental health crisis by Montgomery County officer, Sgt. David Cohen. Last year State's Attorney's declared that Sgt. Cohen's actions were "reasonable." Yet it was clear Finan was experiencing a mental health crisis and Cohen escalated the situation.

Officers such as Sgt. Cohen need to be held accountable and disciplined appropriately. Real police accountability depends on civilian oversight. Not police policing police. It is time for Maryland and Montgomery County government to put measures in place to hold police accountable and prevent yet another recurrence of a similar tragedy.

I oppose bill 49-21 because the bill fails to enable real community participation in the disciplinary process and creates unacceptable conflicts of interest. This bill was drafted without any community input and does not provide community oversight as the state law intended. In addition, the county should consult with the public and be thoughtful about composing these boards. Lastly this bill upholds the status quo, and the status quo is not acceptable.