

**Testimony in Opposition to Bill 32-23 -  
Policing Advisory Commission - Amendments**

**My name is Heidi Rhodes, and I am a resident of Colesville in District 5. On behalf of Jews United for Justice (JUFJ), I am submitting this testimony in opposition to Bill 32-23, which would significantly weaken the Policing Advisory Commission (PAC).**

JUFJ represents over 2,000 Jews and allies from across Montgomery County, who act on our shared Jewish values to work to advance social and economic justice and racial equity in our local community. JUFJ was one of the organizations that supported the creation of the PAC, and we are concerned that the amendments in Bill 32-23 would significantly undermine the PAC's original purpose of providing a voice for the community in policing matters.

As a member of JUFJ, I have attended via Zoom more than 90% of the PAC's meetings over the last three years. I can testify to the intensive research and hard work of the PAC and its members. The PAC has held town halls and issued important policy papers on key policing issues, including its report on MCPD's discriminatory traffic enforcement, each with sound recommendations. The PAC has been effective in its mission to help to shape police policy. For example, Captain Satinsky from MCPD's Community Engagement Division recently shared that the PAC's recommendations regarding the use of Body Worn Cameras were helpful in the creation of a sound policy.

Jewish tradition teaches us that we must not place *mikhshol lifney iver*, a stumbling block, before the blind (Leviticus 19:14), thus making the lives of the already vulnerable more difficult.

**We oppose Bill 32-23 because it adds obstacles to police accountability and transparency in Montgomery County, which in turn harms the Black, brown, poor, disabled, and young people who are most at risk from their interactions with police.**

The proposed amendments to the PAC would reduce participation by members of overpoliced communities and replace those needed perspectives with people who already have the most power, including the police and business members.

**There are already avenues for institutional voices to give their feedback on public safety.** Chief Marcus Jones and the police union are regularly, and sometimes exclusively, asked to advise the Council on matters of safety and policing. They should not be given votes to counteract the impacted communities represented on the PAC. Similarly, business interests and homeowner associations have ample access to elected leaders through Urban District Advisory Committees and HOAs, and represent groups that are neither under-represented in local government nor are historically overpoliced. They do not need a special forum to express their views on policing.

**Furthermore, Bill 32-23's changes to the PAC's structure minimize its impact.**

Changing the nomination process from Councilmember recommendations to full Council votes removes the accountability and transparency of the current system. Staggered terms will eliminate the institutional knowledge the PAC has built over the last three years. One-year terms provide no time for new members to have any impact in their role. And the removal of both youth seats from this commission literally takes away seats at the table from the very young people who experience disproportionate harm from their interactions with police.

**Despite concerns that the PAC and Policing Advisory Board (PAB) are redundant bodies, their missions and mandates are distinct.** The PAC was established to provide a means for the community to advise the County Council on policing, to inform the Council's legislative efforts, and to assist in conducting needed oversight of the Montgomery County Police Department. The PAB is mandated by state law to review police disciplinary actions and advises all branches of our local government, including police departments, on matters of policing. While the PAC does not have all the powers as the newly-established PAB, its contributions are valuable.

**We urge you to recommit to the PAC's purpose of providing needed community engagement in policing matters and to oppose Bill 32-23 and any weakening of the PAC.**