

Good evening Chair Walsh, Vice Chair Dr. Jones, and esteemed members of the council. My name is Paula Seabright and I am here tonight representing the Howard Progressive Project to relay our support of Council Bill 83, which would establish a Police Accountability Board in Howard County.

Since George Floyd's death in late May of 2020, 24 states and the District of Columbia have passed legislation to expand oversight of police agencies. We are happy to see that Howard County has an interest in becoming one of over 160 jurisdictions that have enabled a civilian agency or board.

The National Association for Civilian Oversight of Law Enforcement lists thirteen benefits to civilians, law enforcement officials as well as elected officials that come from having civilian oversight of law enforcement. I will not list them all out, but rather have selected a few.

First and maybe the most obvious, Oversight boards can help hold law enforcement agencies accountable for officer's actions, as well as improve the quality of internal investigations. Second, oversight boards can also be a vehicle for improving community relations by fostering communication between the community and the agencies, and third, oversight boards can assist the community in understanding law enforcement policy and procedures.

The agency states that "All of these potential benefits help to support the goals of community-oriented policing, which seeks to utilize problem solving techniques to work in a cooperative effort with the community to proactively address concerns." We agree.

CB83 calls for five members, with a minimum age of 25. We are hoping that the council will consider amending the minimum age to include a youth member who is between the ages of 16 and 19 and attends a high school in Howard County. We believe it is important to have a youth perspective on boards and commissions and this board should be no different. While many of us have children and believe that we fully understand their concerns and perspective, we are often seeing it through our own distorted lens. Only the voice of a youth can relay the actual concerns of the youth in our community.

And as there has been much attention paid to the role of police in schools, we also are hoping the council will consider amending the duties in section J to include a quarterly examination of trends involving SROs and other officers within Howard County Public Schools. We feel it is critical that a regular unbiased review of police interactions occurs, with the goal of protecting our students from overzealous actions of officers, and ensuring that officers are adhering to their sworn duties within the schools and not stepping into roles for which they may not be properly trained.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak, and thank you for considering this important bill. This commitment to accountability and transparency in our law enforcement agencies will make our agencies and their relationships with the residents of Howard County even stronger.