

November 28, 2023

FAVORABLE TESTIMONY on #23-0445
Charter Amendment- Baltimore City Police Department

Dear Council President Mosby, Vice President Middleton, and members of the Council,

My name is Taylor Smith-Hams and I'm a city resident in the 14th district. I'm writing to amplify the demands of the Campaign for Justice, Safety, and Jobs in support of #23-0445: Charter Amendment- Baltimore City Police Department.

As a longtime resident and activist in Baltimore, I care deeply about local control. As you know, the state of Maryland removed local control from Baltimore on the eve of the Civil War, and, in the contemporary era, the majority Black City of Baltimore has been the only jurisdiction in Maryland (and one of two in the country) to lack local control.

Since the Civil Rights era, Black organizers have been fighting to give the city back the right to legislative authority over BPD, and the movement intensified after the murder of Freddie Gray and the Baltimore Uprising in 2015. In November 2022, Baltimore residents overwhelmingly voted in favor of making BPD a City agency once more.

We need a new City Charter amendment to define the basic powers and responsibilities of BPD. The 2022 charter amendment established the Baltimore Police Department as a City agency but left undone this required "mission statement." Council Bill 23-0445 would create this charter language, which if passed by the City Council, would then be on the ballot in November 2024.

We want the City Council—our local, elected legislators— to have legislative authority to make changes to BPD policy. The Baltimore City Council must finish what it started and expeditiously pass #23-0445 and #23-0449 to fulfill the will of the people and codify local control of the BPD.

Sincerely,

Taylor Smith-Hams