

CHARLES E. SYDNOR III, ESQ.  
*Legislative District 44*  
Baltimore City and Baltimore County

Judicial Proceedings Committee

*Joint Committees*

Children, Youth, and Families

Cybersecurity, Information  
Technology, and Biotechnology

Ending Homelessness



James Senate Office Building  
11 Bladen Street, Room 216  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401  
410-841-3612 · 301-858-3612  
800-492-7122 Ext. 3612  
Charles.Sydnor@senate.state.md.us

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Testimony in  
Support of Council Bill 21-001, as amended  
June 6, 2021**

I want to thank Councilman Burnett for introducing this legislation, working with stakeholders, an amending the bill as needed, to come up with a bill that will temporarily pause the procurement of facial recognition technology until the City is able to take a closer look at the various issues and causes of concern regarding its use. I also want to thank you for this opportunity to present written testimony in support of this legislation.

I have been working on this subject matter for a few years in the Maryland General Assembly while serving in the House of Delegates and the Senate, and it has been a difficult area to successfully introduce and pass legislation. This technology, as with other new, cutting edge technologies, has developed so rapidly that policymakers have been left behind as we have attempted to understand the technology and its ramifications on and uses by governments and our constituents. Working from behind and attempting to balance our constitutional rights and public safety is challenging, but can and must be done. The bill would add two sections to the City Code (the “Code”) concerning facial recognition software and sets out to accomplish three goals.

First, Council Bill 21-001 adds §41-4 to Article 5 of the Code and prohibit non-police city agencies from purchasing, obtaining or contracting for the use of a face surveillance system. As I understand it, the reason for this moratorium, which takes an affirmative act by this City Council to extend beyond December 31, 2021,<sup>1</sup> is so that our policy makers can better understand this technology’s flaws as well as its utilities. There is certainly enough research which points out real concerns to people’s well-being which supports this bill’s temporary pause as a reasonable step.

Second, the bill also creates a new subtitle within Article 19 of the Code and creates a misdemeanor subjecting a person to a \$1000 fine and/or up to 12 months in prison if they obtain, retain, access or use a face surveillance system in Baltimore City.

Finally, it requires the Mayor and City Council to submit a report on the reason for its purchase of “surveillance technology”. This reporting requirement would also sunset at the end of 2022 unless the law is renewed for another five years.

As I understand it, the bill’s sponsor and Councilmember Conway will be introducing a resolution forming a task force which will host a series of hearings over the next year to develop additional recommendations for the use of this technology moving forward. I also believe this is reasonable step so that our policy makers and stakeholders can continue better understand this technology’s

---

<sup>1</sup> This prohibition would sunset at the end of 2022 unless the City finds that the prohibitions remain in the public interest, in which case it may be extended for five more years.

flaws as well as its utilities. In closing, it is encouraging to see the stakeholders working with the Councilman to address his very real concerns. I do not want, and believe you feel the same, anyone's rights to be undermined because we did not take the time to truly understand the consequences of the usage of this technology, publicly discuss it, and come to a decision based founded upon this Country's democratic ideals and principles.