



The Senate of Maryland
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401-1991

September 21, 2020

Dear Senators,

Thank you for your letter regarding this week's public bill hearings on law enforcement reform in the Judicial Proceedings Committee. First, I want to say that I welcome the opportunity to discuss this critical issue. During a time when partisan politics and finger pointing are dominant, I particularly appreciate the ability of Senate members to work together to solve problems, including those relating to policing and law enforcement. These issues are emotional and painful, and effective legislating under these circumstances requires legislators to be thoughtful and purposeful, not reactionary. I am thankful that we can have constructive and meaningful discussions on a variety of challenging issues.

This year has brought a renewed focus on the profession of policing. In the weeks following the killing of George Floyd, tens of thousands of Marylanders protested peacefully – in Baltimore and throughout the State – demanding that we work to fix the systemic injustices that exist in policing. Marylanders are looking to us to ensure that they are safe in their communities and free from abuse and manifestations of inequities. We cannot and should not turn a blind eye on the calls for accountability, transparency, and reform in policing, nor should we put policing reform efforts at odds with initiatives to address and prevent crime. We cannot fully address issues of crime in our State until we address the broken relationship between law enforcement and the communities they serve, especially in many communities of color.

During the 2020 Legislative Session, the Senate of Maryland passed a bipartisan package of community safety legislation, legislation that the Governor vetoed after the legislature adjourned. I am proud of the bipartisan work the Senate did to address issues of violence and root causes of crime, and am hopeful that we again will demonstrate how we can work together for Maryland. Public safety remains a critical issue that we will continue to address moving forward, but we must have public trust in our policing organizations, which is what these hearings are about.

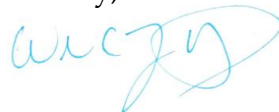
To that end, having the police reform hearings this week gives us the time needed to develop bills that address the injustices in policing while recognizing the complexities of the profession. I appreciate the leadership of Senators Smith, Carter, and Sydnor among many of our colleagues in developing proposals for us to consider. In a June 4, 2020, letter to all members of the Maryland Senate, Chairman Smith wrote the following:

Copies of these proposals will be publicly available as soon as the preliminary drafts are complete. The Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee will hold public hearings in the Fall to address these proposals in advance of the legislative session. In the interim I want to hear from as many individuals and groups as possible. If you have an idea of how we can move our state forward on policing reform my door is always open.

These draft bills and this week's series of hearings serve as a starting point for the members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee to be able to receive meaningful input from constituents, stakeholders, and organizations.

Issues of police reform are complex, thus requiring thoughtful and nuanced solutions. Perhaps most important to getting the solutions right is the need to have enough time for all interested parties to work through the implications and meaning of every word in the proposals, not merely the concepts. I welcome any ideas aimed at restoring the trust between communities and law enforcement agencies over the coming weeks and encourage members to use the additional time before session to work with the bill sponsors.

Sincerely,



Bill Ferguson