



Maryland Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Supports Statements by Commission and Advisory Committees on Police Killings

July 7, 2020

The members of the Maryland Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights join the Commission and the Advisory Committees in Massachusetts, Minnesota, South Carolina, and Tennessee in their Statements condemning the killings of Black people by the police.¹ These statements name George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Rayshard Brooks, and Walter Scott.² These killings have shocked the nation and spawned nationwide protests.

Maryland can add its own names because it has experienced the same type of lethal police abuses towards unarmed Black victims. Five years ago, there were weeks of protests in the city of Baltimore after the killing of Freddie Gray. Many are familiar with the Freddie Gray case. In April 2015, Mr. Gray was taken into police custody and died a week later. Mr. Gray had his hands and feet shackled but was not restrained by a seatbelt in the police van. It was subsequently determined that Mr. Gray was tossed about inside the van and died from injuries sustained to his spinal cord.³ None of the six officers charged criminally in the Freddie Gray incident was ever fired or convicted.

Earlier this year, William Green was shot seven times while handcuffed in a police car. It should go without saying that there is no reason a handcuffed person should be shot multiple times inside a police car.

In June, more than 60 organizations called on Maryland lawmakers to support police reforms, including limiting the use of force by police, making investigations into police misconduct more transparent, and removing officers from schools.⁴

¹ The Advisory Committee vote was 11 to 0.

² Past Commission/Advisory Committee statements included the name of Ahmaud Arbery. While the hunting and killing of Mr. Arbery is appalling and made national news, he was not murdered by an active duty police officer. The Committee contemplated adding additional names to the statement but, as the Massachusetts Advisory Committee noted, there are countless other victims, both named and unknown, killed by members of law enforcement.

³ According to an autopsy report, which was obtained by *Baltimore Sun* reporter Justin Fenton, Mr. Gray's injuries were likely a result of being tossed around the back of a police van while shackled by his hands and feet but unrestrained by a seatbelt.

⁴ Letter from Multiple Organizations to Members of the Maryland General Assembly, <https://docs.google.com/file/d/1jsWz8x5HhmEa1ozqWTrwwWbJBOpjVB8J/edit?filetype=msword>

Maryland Senator William C. Smith Jr. has called on Maryland lawmakers to make sweeping reforms to police accountability practices.⁵ His proposals include making complaints against police officers and disciplinary records public when they involve deaths, shootings, sexual assaults, discrimination, dishonesty or improper use of force. Senator Smith's proposal also calls for allowing "non-law enforcement public officials" to participate in the review of complaints against police officers.⁶

While reforming police practices may be necessary, it is not sufficient. As a civil rights advisory committee, we encourage the State to recognize the need to address systemic racism affecting all communities of color.

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⁵ William C. Smith, Jr., Maryland State Senator, 2020 Police Reform Letter (June 4, 2020), <https://willsmithformaryland.com/2020-police-reform-letter/>.

⁶ House of Delegates Speaker Adrienne A. Jones announced that a group of lawmakers will review police reform and accountability. The group will examine how officer misconduct is investigated and explore possible statewide standards on police use of force, use of body cameras, and the prosecution of crimes committed by police.