



## **Maryland lawmakers eye repeal of law officers' Bill of Rights**

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A proposed law in the Maryland House of Delegates could roll back certain protections for law enforcement officers.

HB0151, sponsored by Del. Gabriel Acevero, D-Montgomery, would fully repeal Maryland's Law Enforcement Officers Bill of Rights.

The law, which provides certain protections for officers under investigation for wrongdoing, has been heavily criticized for frustrating police-reform efforts.

Recommendations for repeal came as a result of recommendations from a Workgroup on Police Reform and Accountability in Maryland that was convened in June.

Acevero told Capital News Service that a repeal of the Law Enforcement Officers Bill of Rights would allow for greater civilian oversight of police departments.

Under the Law Enforcement Officers Bill of Rights, disciplinary hearings are handled by internal review boards.

Maryland House Speaker Adrienne A. Jones in June wrote a letter to Gov. Larry Hogan, R, pushing for extensive police reforms, saying: "enforcement of our laws has not yielded equal justice for all Marylanders. Policing in our country is broken."

Maryland's Law Enforcement Officers Bill of Rights was the first in the nation protecting law enforcement officers from scrutiny.

Lobbying for the bill began in 1973 in response to efforts to clean up the department by former Baltimore Police Department Commissioner Donald Pomerleau, according to the Baltimore Brew. Pomerleau was appointed chief in 1966 and began a campaign aimed at cleaning up corruption in the force that roiled officers.

Accusations of forced polygraphs and preemptive suspensions led officers to argue in Annapolis that their rights as citizens shouldn't disappear due to their occupation, according to the Baltimore Sun.

Adoption of the Law Enforcement Officers Bill of Rights followed in 1974.

The law, called by some the strongest of its kind, provides a host of protections for police officers.

Among the protections it affords is a statute allowing a police officer to have a lawyer present during interrogations, similar to counsel being present for citizens under investigation for crimes.

It also imposes a 90-day limit for investigations involving police brutality and allows the expungement of records after a set period of time.

Bill Johnson, executive director of the National Association of Police Organizations, said that the Law Enforcement Officers Bill of Rights provided a road map on how cases involving officer misconduct could be reviewed.

Johnson told Capital News Service that a repeal would set a “dangerous precedent” to officers that their rights could be taken away at any time.

Critics of the current law complain that the protections afforded make regulatory efforts on police departments difficult.

Hogan’s office declined a request for comment on this story.

Walter Olson, senior fellow at the Cato Institute wrote in July that the law “made it harder for departments to investigate...harder to make changes stick, and harder for the public to learn what is happening.”

Olson currently serves as co-chair of Hogan’s Maryland Citizens Redistricting Commission.

HB0151 is scheduled for a hearing in the House Judiciary committee on Tuesday.