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Testimony from:

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In SUPPORT of JPR 6 Law Enforcement – Surplus Military Equipment  
(Maryland Police Accountability Act 2021)

September 22, 2020

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

Chairman Smith and Members of the Committee:

My name is Arthur Rizer and I am the Director of Criminal Justice & Civil Liberties at the R Street Institute, a nonprofit, nonpartisan, public policy research organization. Not only am I a combat veteran but I also served as a police officer earlier in my career. Having this unique perspective about the goals of both a soldier and a law enforcement officer, I have a particular interest and understanding of the overmilitarization of local police.

Presently, police officers are trained to take command of a situation through force or the threat of force, often starting with commands delivered loudly and aggressively. At the same time, they are trained to be vigilant for anything that could expose them, or those around them, to harm. Indeed, they are trained that American streets are a battleground and behind every corner is a possible enemy. This mindset emphasizes “warrior” policing, aggressive tactics and the hair-trigger willingness to use lethal force.

The phrase “To Protect and to Serve” functions as the mission statement of our police departments today. This mantra originated from a 1955 contest to find a motto for the Los Angeles Police Department, and has since grown to include the call “to serve mankind,” “to protect the innocent” and “to respect the Constitutional rights of all men to liberty, equality, and justice.” Officers also promise “never [to] emplo[y] unnecessary force or violence.”

While the majority of police live by this motto, the perception in America—especially among communities of color and the impoverished—is that the mission has changed. The officers’ call to “protect and serve” has, in many cases, slowly and quietly become indistinguishable with the soldier’s [call](#) to “seek, engage and destroy.”

The R Street Institute has historically supported limiting what pieces of equipment would be accessible to local law enforcement agencies through the federal government's §1033 program. In line with our prior statements, we believe that JPR 6 will successfully limit weapons of war being used against our communities. The bill disallows local agencies from receiving (1) an armored or weaponized aircraft, drone or vehicle; (2) a “destructive device”; (3) a “firearm silencer”; or (4) a grenade launcher. It does not bar an agency from acquiring items of defense like bulletproof vests, cold-weather mittens or used laptops.

Limiting these weapons of war can make our communities safer and improve the perception of police in their communities. Indeed, a 2017 [study](#) found that the dramatic increase in the amount of military equipment available for use by our local police departments is associated with increased police violence and civilian casualties. This association remained significant even when taking into account other factors such as household income, population, the level of violent crime and drug use.

For these reasons, we support JPR 6.

Very Respectfully,

Arthur Rizer  
Director, Criminal Justice & Civil Liberties

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Government Affairs Manager, Criminal Justice & Civil Liberties