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Testimony from:
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In SUPPORT of SB 237, AN ACT concerning Public Safety – Law Enforcement Reform

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Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

My name is Jesse Kelley, and I am the Government Affairs Manager for Criminal Justice and Civil Liberties policy at the R Street Institute—a nonprofit, nonpartisan, public policy research organization. Our mission is to engage in policy research and outreach to promote free markets and limited, effective government in many areas, specifically including police reform, which is why SB 237 is of particular interest to us.

We would first like to applaud the efforts of Senator West and other members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee for their commitment to ensure that meaningful policing reforms are thoroughly discussed and then implemented. Across the country, recent cases of the excessive use of force by police have been caused, in part, by the toxic culture within law enforcement departments. Poor police culture includes a lack of professionalism and respect for human dignity during interactions with the community. It is compounded when accountability, transparency and a desire for continued professional development are not made priorities within police forces.

In light of this, Senate Bill 237 includes many provisions that we believe are critical to make law enforcement departments more effective and efficient in protecting and serving communities. For example, limiting the use of no-knock warrants, requiring the use of body cameras, creating a peer-to-peer duty to intervene and establishing a duty to report any use of force are all positive steps in this regard.

More specifically, employing the use of a body-worn camera does much to increase accountability in a variety of ways. For instance, videos from the perspective of a police officer can aid decision-making when courts look to determine the reasonableness of his or her actions—including the determination as to whether force was necessary. Indeed, because these cameras can record in detail the various actions an officer engaged in, that single step alone works directly to accomplish multiple reform goals.

In addition to the proposed reforms outlined in SB 237, we recommend incorporating de-escalation practices into use-of-force policies, shifting to a non-stress model of academy training, investing in stronger field training officer (FTO) programs, limiting police use of military equipment, and creating new internal accountability policies and programs.

For these reasons, we support SB 237 and the continuing efforts of this committee to bring about meaningful change to policing in Maryland.

Very Respectfully,

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