

# **THE BALTIMORE CITY CIVILIAN REVIEW BOARD**

CHAIRPERSON, Melvin R. Currie

June 22, 2020

To All Concerned Baltimore Residents:

## **Police officers' use of excessive force is often a pattern, not a single incident.**

Before May 25, 2020, Derek Chauvin had seventeen complaints of police misconduct filed against him with the Minneapolis Police Department Internal Affairs Division. According to the Minneapolis Police Department, of these seventeen complaints, only a single one was "closed with discipline," which resulted in two letters of reprimand. Allowed to continue policing unchecked, Chauvin murdered George Floyd. Here in Baltimore, members of Baltimore Police Department's (BPD) former Gun Trace Task Force (GTTF) had a long history of misconduct complaints before being promoted to this specialized unit. This led progressively to an "above the law" mentality that transformed some of the Baltimore City police officers into criminals.

The consequences of police misconduct are also reaching deep into the city's pockets. Since 2010, Baltimore has paid almost \$50 million in civilian payouts for police misconduct. It is the citizens who foot the bill for BPD's misbehavior, while education and social assistance funding is cut every year.

## **Strong, independent civilian oversight of police conduct is fundamental to safe communities and effective policing.**

The Baltimore City Civilian Review Board (CRB) is the ONLY entity in Baltimore City that has authority to independently investigate complaints of police misconduct and make disciplinary recommendations. The CRB provides a safe space for citizens to file complaints on issues of harassment, abusive language, excessive force, false arrest, and false imprisonment by law enforcement officers in Baltimore City. The CRB is composed of nine voting members who are residents of Baltimore City and who have a variety of careers and experiences. The current board includes a mathematician, two lawyers, an educator, a former internal affairs officer, a nurse and a business professional. Non-voting members from the ACLU and the NAACP advise the CRB on matters of interest and concern. The CRB investigators diligently and doggedly investigate complaints, which are then reviewed, discussed, and voted on by the board. Notably, when the CRB evaluates complaints, neither the board nor the investigators have access to the subject officer's disciplinary record or prior complaints. Without this information, it is impossible to determine whether misconduct is an isolated incident or part of a pattern.

We are urging lawmakers to expand the legislative authority of the CRB and increase transparency in this process. Pursuant to state law, the CRB is only permitted to review allegations of excessive force, false arrest, false imprisonment, harassment, and abusive language. Many acts of misconduct fall outside of these allegations. Expanding the CRB's scope of review will allow the CRB to investigate and review additional claims against an officer, such as negligence in the performance of duties.

Just recently, in the wake of COVID-19, and the severe and necessary measures that were taken to protect the residents of Maryland, a Baltimore Police Officer was recorded purposely coughing on residents. The residents' lives were placed in jeopardy by an officer who is bound by a set of ethical rules and procedures intended to protect not injure. This was a national embarrassment as the video recording was disseminated throughout social media. This incident of police misconduct might not qualify as an allegation the CRB is permitted to investigate.

Further, the Maryland Law Enforcement Officers' Bill of Rights (LEOBR) protects officers and presents innumerable barriers that prohibit the CRB from implementing its full statutory authority. For

instance, the CRB has the legal authority to subpoena witnesses, including witness officers, but is not permitted to interview the subject officer, because they are protected by LEOBR.

The CRB is struggling with the same feeling of sadness, vulnerability and hopelessness that many Americans are feeling. In the wake of the death of so many African American women and men, #saytheirnames: George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Tamir Rice, Trayvon Martin, Oscar Grant, Eric Garner, Philando Castile, Samuel Dubose, Sandra Bland, Walter Scott, Terrence Crutcher, and our very own Freddie Gray, to name a few, are notable and publicized deaths due to egregious behavior by police. More alarming, there are undoubtedly many countless unknown deaths and police misconduct incidents that have gone unreported and unsolved. More than ever there is a need to hold police accountable for their actions when they go beyond their duty to protect and serve the citizens of Baltimore.

**It is evident that the police cannot police themselves.** Civilian oversight is necessary to ensure an appropriate and fair punishment for police misconduct. The moment a police officer's engagement with a citizen becomes concerning or is outside of the scope of duty, the CRB should have the authority to investigate. Police departments' own investigation units are not up to the task.

Unfortunately, the CRB does not have the mandate to initiate an investigation of what it believes to be police misconduct. If you or someone you know has been a victim of misconduct by police in Baltimore City, we encourage you to please let us know!

**To file a complaint:**

**Visit: <https://civilrights.baltimorecity.gov/civilian-review-board/file>**

**Call: 410.396.3151**

**Email: [CRBIntake@baltimorecity.gov](mailto:CRBIntake@baltimorecity.gov)**

In the meantime, we will continue to advocate for the residents of the City of Baltimore.

Baltimore's Truly,

Melvin R. Currie  
Baltimore City Civilian Review Board  
2020 Chairperson

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