

Police Officers Seek Help from Md. Lawmakers

Ford, William J . Washington Informer ; Washington, D.C. [Washington, D.C]28 Mar 2019: 13.

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FULL TEXT

ANNAPOLIS - Four former and current Prince Georges County police officers request state lawmakers draft legislation for stronger police reforms through transparency and accountability.

Those officers - Joe Perez, Sonya L. Zollicoffer, Michael Brown and Thomas Boone - appeared Thursday, March 21 before the Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland in

Annapolis. They are also part of an ongoing lawsuit with other current and former county officers against the Police Department for alleged discrimination against Black and Latino officers and residents.

"This has been going on for years," said Joe Perez, a 20-year police veteran. "To keep the same [police] administration, all you are doing is condoning this type of behavior. We need your help."

For instance, Perez said tougher rules should be incorporated in reference to the states law enforcement officers' bill of rights.

According to the document, "a law enforcement agency may not bring administrative charges against... [an] officer unless the agency files the charges within one year after the act that gives rise to the charges..."

However, the one-year limitation doesn't apply to criminal activity or excessive force offenses, according to the document.

In addition, at least a dozen other states incorporate this bill of rights, also called LEOBoR, which has a provision where an officer isn't interrogated for 10 days "until representation is obtained."

While questioned, an officer may receive "personal necessities and rest periods as reasonably necessary."

"It's an additional protection the state of Maryland gives [an officer]," Perez said.

Jennifer Donelan, spokeswoman for the Prince George's Police Department, advised residents to view the department's Facebook page for coverage of various press conferences. One includes a video posted March 7 about an officer indicted for assault.

"I would love to comment, but due to the ongoing litigation against us, we are unable to discuss this matter," she said. "We have gone on record in the last two years about efforts we have made and continue to make to get concerns from officers, if they have them, so they can be addressed."

Del. Gabriel Acevero (D-Mont-gomery County) introduced a bill to create a citizen complaint process that would require law enforcement to share information and documentation from current and previous police-involved incidents. The bill, named after Anton Black, a Black teenager from Caroline County who died in September while in police custody, remains under review by the House Judiciary Committee.

In June, Montgomery County police fatally shot Robert Lawrence White, 41, an unarmed Black man from Silver Spring.

"We talk often about the blue wall of silence," Acevero said. "I see this as a more holistic conversation about how we reform and make our police departments more transparent and accountable.

They are among the most unaccountable public institutions not just in our state, but in this country."

Del. Erek Barron (D-District 24) of MtcheUville said the Black Caucus will support legislation that ensures community safety.

"It's not just about Black or brown police officers, but this is also about public transparency and accountability," he said.

DETAILS

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