

# After officer is charged with assault, Montgomery considers a Policing Advisory Commission

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## FULL TEXT

The Montgomery County Council held a public hearing Tuesday on a bill to establish a Policing Advisory Commission that would examine and recommend policies governing police behavior in the Maryland county. Several high-profile incidents involving police have raised tensions between local law enforcement and civilians recently.

Earlier Tuesday, a police officer from Silver Spring was charged with second-degree assault and misconduct after a video appeared to show him using his shin to force a man's head to the ground during an arrest.

The proposed commission would consist of 15 members: nine civilians appointed by the council, four civilians appointed by the county executive and two ex officio members, one each for the police department and the Fraternal Order of Police.

Unlike civilian oversight boards in jurisdictions such as Baltimore, the commission would not oversee individual disciplinary cases but would be able to make general recommendations to the county council about disciplinary policy, said council member Hans Riemer (D-At Large).

"It would not review complaints about an officer, or investigate a police-involved incident. While those are crucial matters, Maryland state law denies a body like this jurisdiction over personnel matters," Riemer, the lead sponsor of the bill, wrote in a statement.

In an interview, he added: "The hope is that this will create a more collaborative approach and that we won't have an oppositional dynamic between the body and the police department."

The council will vote on the bill in the fall.

At a small demonstration before the public hearing, several activists said they approve of the idea of a civilian-led commission. But some do not think that the Fraternal Order of Police, which is the union that represents the police officers, or the police department should have seats on the commission, even if they are nonvoting members.

"Who will have a voice on this commission?" state Del. Gabriel Acevero (D-Montgomery) asked a group of two dozen activists gathered outside the county council building ahead of the public hearing. "Is this going to be another bureaucratic entity? Or is this going to serve the people?"

President of the Maryland Fraternal Order of Police Ismael "Vince" Canales countered at the hearing that the commission should consist of members with experiences in law enforcement. Canales called on the council to increase the number of police representatives from two to four.

Riemer started working on the bill with members of the NAACP after the June 2018 shooting of Robert Lawrence White, an unarmed black man, in Silver Spring.

In the months since that shooting, council members say, they have been trying to restore public faith in law enforcement.

In May, Montgomery became the first major jurisdiction in the Washington region to require outside law enforcement agencies to investigate police-involved deaths.

## DETAILS

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