



CONTACT:

Rob English, Lead Organizer, (443) 756-7883

**BUILD STATEMENT OF SUPPORT FOR SB 793/HB 1094:
THE COMMUNITY SAFETY AND STRENGTHENING ACT**

February 22, 2019

Baltimore, MD—Over the years, BUILD has listened to residents of Baltimore City, going door to door, neighborhood to neighborhood, congregation to congregation. We have heard the cries of mothers and fathers who have lost their children to violence. We have heard the youth of our neighborhoods ask, “Why are you not doing more to stop the violence?” Over and over again, we have heard the residents of Baltimore City demand accountable, relational policing as a solution to the violence of their neighborhoods.

That’s why BUILD has organized to push the city’s police department for greater accountability in training, in policy, in reporting, and in discipline, and to pressure commanders to work in relationship with communities to improve safety.

During this present time, while the Baltimore City Police Department is struggling to maintain numbers, root out corruption, and acclimate to shifting leadership, **BUILD believes the proposed Johns Hopkins Police Department is a way to bring a new model of policing to Baltimore City, one that is grounded in the idea of accountable policing and that can serve as an example to the rest of the city—perhaps the state and the nation—of what policing should look like.**

Of course, we yearn to live in a world where we do not need more police officers. We work toward the day that Baltimore City no longer loses its children to the violence of the streets. But in current-day Baltimore City, our beleaguered police department is stretched thin, and Johns Hopkins University has a responsibility to protect the students and patients it has been charged to serve.

We know that wherever there is policing, there is an increased risk of racial profiling and excessive use of force. We know how implicit bias and systemic racism works. Unless there are specific safeguards in place for maintaining standards of procedural justice and ensuring the highest quality of training of police, incidents of profiling and force are sure to occur.

In the past year, BUILD called on President Ron Daniels of Johns Hopkins University to be intentional in the institution’s community engagement. A proposed police force is not an experiment, because lives are far too valuable to be experimented upon; it is imperative to BUILD that if a police department is created, it should be done with the utmost respect for the individuals it serves. At the urging of BUILD, President Daniels met with community groups and went door to door in East Baltimore, listening to real and raw stories from local residents about their experiences and concerns with police.

BUILD also challenged President Daniels—should the time come—to build a department that is transparent, publicly accountable, and can serve as a prototype of citizen engagement and best practices to law enforcement across the country, including the Baltimore City Police Department. **BUILD’s goal in doing so is to ensure that incidents of profiling and excessive use of force do not occur, but should they occur, ensure that mechanisms are in place for discipline and accountability.**

Out of this work, the proposed Johns Hopkins Police Department now requires the following:

- A disciplinary hearing board that will include two civilian members, a radical move that subverts the norms of policing in the interest of public accountability.
- An accountability board that will be comprised of representatives from neighboring communities. Residents will be in position to influence policy and accountability for this police department. No university, municipal, or state police department in Maryland has this level of citizen involvement.
- A mandated minimum percentage (to be specified in the legislation) of officers who serve in the department will live in Baltimore City. These officers will know the communities they patrol and have a personal stake in their safety.
- BUILD will assist with training the department on relational policing and cultural competency, making key introductions between the department and leaders in neighborhoods and immigrant communities where BUILD organizes.
- In addition to annual reporting as outlined in the legislation, JHU has committed to releasing public semi-annual reports for the first five years of the existence of the department to demonstrate its commitment to increase transparency and build trust with the greater community.
- One of the first actions of the department will be to issue a Citizens Bill of Rights. This document will outline the department's definition of constitutional policing and will serve to educate students, staff, and community members on their rights and expectations when interacting with the Johns Hopkins Police Department.

Because the proposed Johns Hopkins Police Department contains safeguards to hold officers and the department itself accountable for their actions, and because BUILD understands the urgent need for accountable policing in neighborhoods of Baltimore City, **BUILD supports the legislation that would authorize Johns Hopkins University to launch a police department.**

In the coming months and years, BUILD will be on the frontlines, watching carefully to hold Johns Hopkins University and their proposed force accountable to the commitments they have laid out and the values they proclaim. We will be there to ensure they are building a model police department in the heart of Baltimore City—a police department that is community-oriented, constitutional in practice, culturally competent, and publicly accountable.

###

Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development (BUILD) is a broad-based community power organization, rooted in Baltimore's neighborhoods and congregations. BUILD is non-partisan, interfaith, multiracial, and dedicated to making Baltimore a better place for all to live and thrive. For over 40 years, BUILD has worked to make safe communities, improve housing, increase job opportunities, and rebuild schools. BUILD is affiliated with the Industrial Areas Foundation, the oldest and largest network of community organizations in the United States.