



Justice for All

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Testimony on CB30-2025

Submitted by Justice For All

Howard County Council | April 2025

My name is Hena Zuberi, and I'm testifying today on behalf of Justice For All, a national human rights organization committed to defending religious freedom and minority rights, and confronting genocide and state repression in all its forms.

We are here in support with amendments of CB30-2025—a much-needed bill that offers long-overdue reforms to the Howard County Human Rights Commission.

This is not just a matter of local governance—it's a matter of moral and democratic urgency.

Just days ago, on April 18, NPR reported that the U.S. State Department is quietly stripping its annual human rights report of several key elements—sections that once helped expose violations, signal danger, and protect vulnerable populations. At a time when human rights protections are eroding at the national level, local government must stand as a firewall.

Howard County has a proud history of doing just that. During the Civil Rights Era, when federal protections were too slow or too politicized, it was county commissions and local ordinances that first integrated schools, protected workers from racial discrimination, and pushed back on exploitative policing. In the 1980s, it was cities like Berkeley and Cambridge that stood against apartheid before the federal government would. Even more recently, counties across America took action to protect undocumented communities when ICE overreach went unchecked by Washington.

But our local institutions only serve justice when they are built to do so—when they are staffed by individuals qualified, trained, and uncompromised by political cronyism.

CB30-2025 provides a framework for this.

We strongly support the bill's move to require relevant expertise—in civil rights, conflict resolution, or human rights law—for those serving on the Human Rights Commission. This Commission is not a ceremonial body. It must be an engine for justice, capable of discerning patterns of discrimination and holding powerful institutions accountable. This can't happen if seats are filled as political favors or consolation prizes for loyalty to entrenched power.

We also support the bill's mandatory training requirements, ensuring that all commissioners understand the tools and responsibilities they hold. We train hundreds of advocates across the country each year—we know firsthand that training transforms passivity into courage.

Why is this bill so critical?

Because the current Commission has repeatedly failed the very communities it exists to serve.

It failed to act swiftly when community members exposed appalling conditions and abuse in the local detention center under the ICE contract. When the people cried out for protection, the Commission looked the other way.

It failed again when students, educators, and residents reported systemic censorship, anti-Palestinian discrimination, and chilling First Amendment violations in our schools and civic spaces. Despite mounting evidence, the Commission neither investigated nor issued guidance. That silence was complicity.

CB30-2025 is a step toward restoring public trust and institutional credibility. But let us be clear: it must be a beginning—not an end.

We urge the Council to explore additional reforms, including:

- An independent and transparent appointment process, so that future commissioners are selected based on merit and community respect—not insider access.
- A formal mechanism to ensure the Commission must respond to credible community complaints, especially those concerning students, marginalized groups, or religious minorities.

At Justice For All, we work globally to prevent genocide and protect fundamental freedoms. We know the warning signs. And we also know that silence and inaction in the face of community harm—however bureaucratically justified—lays the groundwork for deeper injustice.

The stakes are high. Please vote in favor of CB30-2025—with strength, clarity, and the conviction that Howard County can and must lead where others falter.

Thank you.



HCCA

Howard County Citizens Association

Since 1961...

The Voice Of The People of Howard County

Date: 21 April 2025

Subject: HCCA in FAVOR of CB30-2025

Good evening.

I am Stu Kohn from Scaggsville representing the Howard County Citizens Association, HCCA as its President.

We are in FAVOR of CB30-2025 and appreciate Council-member Liz Walsh providing specific qualifications required to be a member of the Human Rights Commission. We only wish qualifications would be much stricter regarding both the Planning and Appeals Board other than to be a resident of Howard County.

We do have a suggestion to strengthen the Bill as follows:

Refer to Page 1, Line 20 - add after the word "commission" within 3 months from becoming a new member. Failure to comply will result in any member being removed from the commission.

When referring to the Human Rights Commission Rules of Procedure on Page 5 it states, "that on or before 28 February of each year an Annual Report is to be issued to the County Executive and Council." Curious - have you received these reports during your tenure? Any possibility these reports will be posted on the Human Rights Commission website to inform the public.

The Human Rights Commission should be commended as their minutes on the County website are only two months in arrears. We say this because of the 57 listed showing 17 or 30 percent have no minutes posted, 5 have not been updated for over a year and 14 have not posted their minutes during the past 3 to 8 months. For your information HCCA pointed out the woeful lack of attention to detail of minutes not being posted in a timely manner during County Executive Kittleman's Administration. They were very appreciative and took the necessary action to ensure all cooperated. We hope the Council and Administration will take the necessary action for all Boards and Commissions to update their minutes. We request our leadership takes responsibility to keep the public informed of their activities by mandating all Board and Commissions minutes are required to be updated. See details on next pages.

Thank You,

Stu Kohn
HCCA President

Boards and Commissions with No Minutes Posted

Adult Public Guardianship Review Board
Adult-Use Cannabis Advisory Panel
Affordable Housing Working Group
Agricultural Preservation Board
Animal Matters Hearing Board
Board of Elections
Board of Library Trustees
Cable Advisory Committee
Economic Development Authority Board of Directors
Interfaith Advisory Council
Internal Affairs Hearing Board
Planning Board
Plumbing Advisory Board
Property Tax Assessment Appeals Board
Public Facilities Spaces Report Evaluation and Action Commission
Social Services Board
Soil Conservation District

Boards and Commissions Not Posting Minutes a Year or More

Board of Electrical Examiners
Coalition to End Homelessness
Local Children's Board
Public Spaces Commission – Last recorded October 2021
Revenue Authority – Last recorded March 2016

Boards and Commissions Not Posting Minutes the Past Three to Eight Months

Administrative Charging Committee
Board of Health
Board to Promote Self Sufficiency
Cemetery Preservation Advisory Board
Citizens' Election Fund Commission
Housing and Community Development Board
La Alianza Latina Commission
LGBTQIA+ Commission
Opioid Restitution Fund Commission
Pension Oversight Commission
Personnel Board
Police Accountability Board
Public Works Board
Workforce Development Board

Boards and Commissions Minutes Posted the Last Two Months

Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance Review Committee
Advisory Board on Consumer Protection
Asian American and Pacific Islander Commission
Commission on Aging
Commission on Disabilities
Commission for Transitioning Students with Disabilities
Commission for Veterans and Military Family
Commission for Women
Design Advisory Panel
Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday Commission
Economic Competitiveness and Opportunity Task Force – (new)
Environmental Sustainability Board
Equal Business Opportunity Commission
Ethics Commission
Flag Commission
Gateway Master Plan Advisory Board
Historic Preservation Commission
Human Rights Commission
Local Behavioral Health Advisory Board
Multimodal Transportation Board
Recreation and Parks Advisory Board