This statement is on behalf of the organizing committee of Southern Maryland Democratic Socialists of America whose membership includes Charles County residents. I’d like to note that Charles County is located on the ancestral home of the Piscataway people, who still live in the area today. This is always important to keep in mind, but it’s especially important when we speak about policing — our country is young and built on stolen land. Policing as we know it is even younger, and built from the same aggressive and violent system of for profit colonial capitalism.

We must avoid the temptation that the Police Accountability Board be as pro-police as possible while still having the appearance of impartiality. Not only would this be contrary to the purpose of a Police Accountability Board, it would also deny the ordinary residents of Charles County the opportunity to have their opinions heard objectively. A diversity of perspectives on this board is critical, because when police cause harm, they do not only harm those with fancy resumes in positions of power. Rather police violence disproportionately affects the most vulnerable in society, and this proposal must not weaken the voice of those who most likely have the most to say regarding police accountability; but rather serve to strengthen that voice. We insist that the following stipulations be made:

First, there should be no requirement that a certain number of board positions be held by former law enforcement. Filling the board with retired law enforcement is functionally the same as filling it with current law enforcement, as retired law enforcement officers have the same biases and have received the same flawed training. The reason this board is needed in the first place is because police cannot be trusted to police the police. Additionally, If everyone on the board is supposed to receive training on police procedure, then the expertise of retired LEOs is in excess and is therefore not needed. Furthermore, LEOs are not the only professions that are knowledgeable about the criminal justice system.

Third, there should be no connection whatsoever between board members and police, clubs, unions, organizations or any company which has a history of conducting business with police clubs, unions, organizations, agencies or departments. No board member should have police (active or retired) as next of kin. Such would create a clear conflict of interest, compromising the integrity of board proceedings.

Fourth, career military whether active or retiree should similarly be banned from the board in consideration of their disproportionate familiarity with violence and potentially lethal force. We need a board that represents normal working civilians from the various and diverse populations and gender identities present in the county and the extended state.

Fifth, there should be no education requirement for board members. Higher education is not accessible to everyone, so requiring a college degree for board members is a privileged point of exclusion. A college degree doesn’t mean anything about a person’s morality or right to self-governance.

Sixth, a prior conviction should NOT be automatic grounds for disqualifying board or committee membership. Not only are community members who have been convicted of crimes require representation, they have the most insight on the problems of this system, and conviction whether yesterday or decades ago says very little about the content of a person’s character today, especially when our justice system has not yet enjoyed this new level of accountability. Such a requirement seems specifically designed to bar from the board those who have been harmed by policing and most likely to upset the status quo. It is worth noting that since the board is appointed; whether a person has a criminal record or not is of no consequence, since appointments may be decided merely on a person’s character alone.

Seventh, this board needs clearly defined subpoena and other legal powers. It is vital that this board be granted the legal authority to make meaningful change in this county, not just have the appearance of accountability. That is only possible if the board has true legal authority.

Eight, the board needs clearly defined conflict of interest rules, baring all association past or present between board members and police, their agencies, departments, unions, or any company which contracts with, or advocates for police or their unions. Current and former board members and executives or any employees of companies that contract with any county Sheriff or municipal police office should be specifically prohibited from serving on this board, as this would constitute a blatant and significant conflict of interest.

Ninth, a “whole-health” approach to the board should be cultivated by creating special criteria for board chairmanship requiring that his or her “relevant experience” be that of a practitioner in the field of mental health.

Tenth, regarding transparency, we demand the following:

- It shall be fully disclosed how and why members have or haven’t been selected

- clear steps and sought-after skills and or experience shall be established

- public insight and commentary regarding selection shall be openly solicited

- an outline of how subpoena powers are to be practiced, shall be made public

- absolute transparency in the investigation process and their results shall be guaranteed

Eleventh, we believe that board membership should be relatively large 13 to 15 members, so as to ensure full representation of the various communities within the county and state at large. Board members should be at least voting age and serve terms of 4 years, up to three consecutive terms, not to coincide with council election. Appointment should be staggered renewing half the appointments every two years, so that new members can gain experience by way of cooperation with more experienced members, still serving the remainder of their term.

Twelth, it shall be mandatory that conduct complaint forms shall be drafted by the board, posted on their home webpage, and issued by every LEO in the county to each party or person at the close of every official interaction with members of the public. All forms shall be submitted directly to the board and the identity of the complainant shall be protected to the fullest extent practicable. Each step of the processing as well as the results of all complaints shall be communicated directly to the complainant and be made publicly available.