

On Tue, Nov 9, 2021 at 10:32 PM WJCC Coalition for Community Justice <wjcccej@gmail.com> wrote:

Dear Members of the FOIA Council,

The Williamsburg James City County Coalition for Community Justice is writing in support of HB2196. Our coalition is made up of community-based organizations and individuals working toward a criminal legal system that is just for all people. Key aspects of ensuring justice for all are transparency and accountability in our government.

This bill would provide both by granting the public access to law enforcement disciplinary records so that we could see how complaints are being handled by internal affairs departments. A crucial part of this bill is the inclusion of both sustained and unsustained claims against law enforcement. Including both types of complaints removes any incentive to improperly find them unsustained. Currently only a small portion of complaints are usually sustained. For example, in Williamsburg in 2020 only 18% of complaints were sustained. Without having access to both types of complaints, it is impossible to know whether the complaints were thoroughly investigated.

Our coalition advocates for the creation of civilian oversight boards to ensure accountability among our local police, and having access to these records through FOIA would be a critical piece of this work. We give police officers the ability to take life and liberty and need to be sure that there is transparency in their work. Police departments are publicly funded and must be accountable to those they serve.

We believe that HB2196 will greatly improve police accountability and public trust, leading to safer, more just communities for all. We ask that the FOIA Council vote to recommend this bill as approved by the Records Issues subcommittee.

Thank you,

Members of the WJCC Coalition for Community Justice