



## **Organization for Black Struggle**

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### **Testimony on HB 1601 for Local Control of Police**

The Organization for Black Struggle (OBS) has been involved in issues both internal and external to the St. Louis Police Department for nearly 30 years. We are a member of the Coalition Against Police Crimes & Repression. One of the Coalition's main goals is the attainment of local control.

OBS was part of a multi-year community campaign to raise the issue of police accountability and local control that led to a unanimous resolution by the St. Louis Board of Alderman to support the concept of local control. That campaign confirmed that the overwhelming majority of citizens in St. Louis favor local control of its police department that accounts for one third of the city budget.

Citizens of St. Louis continue to ask why they must hold onto an outdated, undemocratic system as the current one that keeps local control in the hands at the state level. Missouri is the only state in the country where this situation exists. St. Louis and Kansas City are the only two cities in the state held captive to this model. I have yet to find a state legislator who can adequately explain why the citizens in their district enjoy local control of their police departments while St. Louis citizens are continually held hostage to a model adopted during the Civil War.

Local control is just good government. In St. Louis, the Board of Alderpeople has very little control over on of our largest departments representing one-third of the City's budget. Local control allows for government officials to better coordinate public safety policies. In emergencies, first responders such as firefighters and police need a single guiding hand. In the ongoing struggle to improve neighborhoods, city officials want to be able to direct resources to targeted areas and know that police efforts are focused in the same direction.

As you know, since our first introduction of local control legislation a couple of years ago, our police department has been involved in fiscal and ethical scandals they have been escalating for years. Police Chief Mokwa was forced to resign; public trust was shattered. The St. Louis Police Department has too often ignored citizen consensus on issues dear to them such as residency that could have positively contributed to a more superior management operations.

The Coalition has worked diligently on language that assures a smooth transition and that sufficiently addressed most of the outstanding concerns of local control opponents, such as employee pensions and where the accountability buck will stop.

The Organization for Black Struggle asks that pass the bill out of the Urban Issues Committee as well as work with your colleagues to get the bill passed on the floor. We ask that you pass HB 1601 this legislative session and bring the state of Missouri into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Jamala Rogers  
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