

Department of Legislative Services  
2011 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE  
Revised

Senate Bill 12

(Senator Stone)

Judicial Proceedings

Environmental Matters

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Maryland Quiet Vehicles and Pedestrian Safety Advisory Committee

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This emergency bill establishes the Maryland Quiet Vehicles and Pedestrian Safety Advisory Committee. The bill expresses legislative intent that the Secretary of Transportation appoint the same individuals who were appointed to the Maryland Quiet Vehicles and Pedestrian Safety Task Force established by Chapter 249 of 2009 and who were serving when the task force terminated year-end 2010.

The bill terminates June 30, 2013.

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Fiscal Summary

**State Effect:** The bill is not anticipated to materially affect State operations or finances.

**Local Effect:** None.

**Small Business Effect:** None.

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Analysis

**Bill Summary:** The advisory committee is tasked with:

- studying the effects of vehicle sound on pedestrian safety and all available technology that may enhance the safety of blind pedestrians;
- reviewing all available research regarding the effects of vehicle sound on pedestrian safety;
- monitoring efforts by the federal government and the automobile industry to establish safety standards for hybrid and electric vehicles;

- consulting with specified advocates and consumer groups, including those representing individuals who are blind, experts on automobile design and other specified matters, and interested members of the public; and
- advising the Secretary of Transportation concerning the minimum sound level and the nature and characteristics of the minimum sound that should be required for all new and used vehicles sold and registered in Maryland and the use of technology to enhance the safety of blind pedestrians.

The advisory committee consists of at least five, but no more than seven, individuals representing the organized blind community, pedestrian organizations, and the interests of automobile manufacturers.

The Maryland Department of Transportation may provide staff support for the advisory committee.

**Current Law/Background:** Chapters 384 and 385 of 2008 established the Maryland Quiet Vehicles and Pedestrian Safety Task Force to:

- study the effects of vehicle sound on pedestrian safety;
- review available research on the effects of vehicle sound on pedestrian safety and consult with consumer groups and safety advocates;
- conduct hearings to accept testimony from experts and the public; and
- make recommendations regarding a minimum sound level, the nature and characteristics of the minimum sound that should be required for all new vehicles sold and licensed in Maryland, and the use of technology to enhance the safety of blind pedestrians.

The task force consisted of one representative from MDOT; one representative from the Maryland Department of the Environment; one individual from an organization representing the interests of automobile manufacturers; two or three individuals who represent the organized blind community, are legally blind, and have experience in training the blind to travel safely; and two or three individuals who represent pedestrian organizations.

As required by statute, the task force published a final report in December 2008. The report noted that, because all pedestrians, but particularly blind people, depend on sound cues produced by internal-combustion engines to travel safely, the increase in quieter hybrid, electric, and other low-emission vehicles presents a growing safety concern. The report concluded that there is sufficient anecdotal evidence of this emerging problem but found that a lack of data from the federal government and automobile industry was preventing progress in addressing this concern. Therefore, the report recommended that

the task force be reconstituted and include a member of the Maryland House of Delegates and Senate. The report also recommended that the General Assembly adopt a resolution encouraging this State's congressional delegation to support federal legislation, that the Governor write to the U.S. Department of Transportation to encourage adoption of regulatory standards, and that the task force actively engage with the State and federal government and industry on how to achieve progress on making quiet vehicles safer for pedestrians.

The task force was reconstituted by Chapters 249 and 250 of 2009 with the two new legislative members and released its final report before terminating on December 31, 2010. The final report noted that new research indicates that crashes involving quiet vehicles with pedestrians and bicyclists are indeed more common than crashes involving internal-combustion engine vehicles. The report also discussed that, while significant technological and policy progress is being made at the federal and international levels to equip quiet cars with synthetic noise-making devices, there is a relative lack of progress on retrofitting existing vehicles with after-market devices. Therefore, the task force recommended reconvening until June 30, 2013, in order to continue its coordination with industry and other governmental entities, identify potential after-market technologies, and evaluate those technologies, including through use and testing on State-owned vehicles.

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### **Additional Information**

**Prior Introductions:** None.

**Cross File:** None.

**Information Source(s):** Maryland Department of the Environment, Maryland Department of Transportation, Department of Legislative Services

**Fiscal Note History:** First Reader - January 18, 2011  
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