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February 6, 2020

The Honorable Kumar P. Barve  
Chairman, House Environment and Transportation Committee  
251 House Office Building  
Annapolis MD 21401

***Re: Letter of Support – House Bill 133 – Vehicle Emissions Inspection Program –  
Deployed Military Personnel – Exemption***

Dear Chairman Barve and Committee Members:

The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) supports House Bill 133 as a customer service measure for active duty military members and their families.

House Bill 133 provides that a vehicle owned by at least one active duty armed services member is exempt from a scheduled mandatory vehicle emissions inspection if an owner has received orders for deployment outside the United States or to a duty station in a jurisdiction without a vehicle emissions control inspection and maintenance program. The bill further specifies that all owners certify that qualifying military orders have been received by one of the vehicle owners.

In accordance with the Federal Clean Air Act, Maryland operates a vehicle emissions inspection program (VEIP), which requires the biennial testing of vehicle exhaust emissions for certain vehicles. Current law provides for the exemption from mandatory vehicle emissions inspections in two cases: (i) for owners who meet specified disability requirements, have been issued special registration plates for their vehicle, and drive the vehicle fewer than 5,000 miles annually; and (ii) for owners who are at least 70 years of age and drive the vehicle fewer than 5,000 miles annually. House Bill 133 expands the exemption in a third case: for active military personnel deployed overseas or to a domestic duty station in a jurisdiction without a vehicle emissions inspection program. Active duty military customers meeting the requirements will be able to defer the testing of their vehicles for one inspection cycle at a time, and may apply for additional waivers for as long as they qualify.

Current law and regulation permit lengthy extensions of a vehicle emissions testing due date—up to 48 weeks—for out-of-state work assignments, education, and other extenuating circumstances; and allow customers temporarily residing outside of Maryland to submit out-of-state test results to the Maryland program for credit. However, MDOT Motor Vehicle Administration (MDOT MVA) recognizes the unique challenge and the burden to military customers who must balance domestic responsibilities with a deployment overseas or the relocation to a new duty station. As a result, many service members end up relying on relatives to ensure vehicles stay in compliance through a series of waivers, or at worst, fail to stay in compliance.

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In recognition of the service and sacrifice of Maryland veterans, Governor Hogan declared 2019 as the Year of the Veteran. In October 2019, MDOT MVA was proud to heed the call to honor veterans in new and meaningful ways by partnering with the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) to open a first-of-its kind Veterans Service Center at the MDOT MVA Glen Burnie branch office, hosting a full-time veteran's benefits specialist available to assist veterans and their families. MDOT MVA also has several ways for veterans to show their pride: driver license and identification card holders can add the "Veterans Status" to their card, which indicates eligibility for state veteran benefits. MDOT MVA also issues permanent vehicle registration cards and license plate stickers to 100 percent disabled veterans, and offers more than 100 types of specialty license plates honoring veterans and their families.

Exempting certain active duty military personnel from the VEIP requirements is a reasonable accommodation for this group of customers who already bear a heavy burden. This exemption allows for greater customer convenience and flexibility, while still preserving the integrity of the emissions program. For these reasons, the Maryland Department of Transportation respectfully requests the Committee grant House Bill 133 a favorable report.

Respectfully submitted,

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