Written Testimony of Keshia M. Pollack Porter, PhD, MPH
Before the Maryland House Environment and Transportation Committee
in **STRONG SUPPORT** of
House Bill 1324: Workgroup on Statewide vehicle Crash Data Collection and Reporting
March 5, 2020

Good afternoon Chairperson Barve and members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee. My name is Dr. Keshia Pollack Porter and I am a Professor in the Department of Health Policy and Management at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. I am an international expert in injury prevention, policy, health equity, and disparities. I am a strong proponent for having data systems that allow us to fully understand problems and target resources to populations that are disproportionately impacted. I strongly support House Bill (HB) 1324. I submit this testimony as a public health professional and concerned resident of Maryland. I am not representing the view or position of the Johns Hopkins University or Bloomberg School of Public Health.

HB 1324 establishes the Workgroup on Statewide Vehicle Crash Data Collection and Reporting, which will examine the processes used to collect and report statewide vehicle crash data for injuries and fatalities, as well as the categories into which the statewide vehicle crash data are disaggregated and reported; as well as determine the most effective manner for the State to begin to collect, disaggregate, and report by race and ethnicity statewide vehicle crash data for injuries and fatalities. This bill is critically important for the State, and below are three reasons why we need to look at race and ethnicity in Maryland crash data.

First, motor vehicles crashes are one of the leading causes of death in the U.S., accounting for over 36,500 deaths in 2018 alone. In Maryland, over 500 people died from a traffic fatality in 2018.[1] While the fatality rate in Maryland, 8.29 per 100,000 population is lower than the national average of 11.17 per 100,000, it is more than double the states with the lowest rate (4.41 per 100,000). Deaths are only the tip of the iceberg. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, for every person killed in a crash, nine people were hospitalized, and 88 people were treated and released from emergency departments. These deaths and injuries are a major public health problem and are preventable.

Second, we need accurate data to promote traffic safety. The website for the Maryland Department of Transportation states that "crash data are an essential component in identifying and defining roadway safety problems…When properly understood, analyzed and used, crash data are a powerful asset to any highway safety program." Currently, the Maryland Highway Safety Office's annual report aggregates crash data by the characteristics of the individuals and vehicles involved in a crash, as well as the characteristics of the roadway. Characteristics of the individuals involved in the crash include drivers' age and gender, seatbelt use, and whether alcohol was involved; data on race or ethnicity are not collected. By not determining the race and ethnicity of people involved in crashes, important disparities continue to go unreported and unnoticed.

Third, Maryland is primed to implement crash prevention strategies like Vision Zero, which is an international road traffic safety strategy to eliminate all traffic-related fatalities and major injuries. Based on my research, having accurate, reliable, and specific data are essential for effective implementation of Vision Zero. If we don't know who exactly are involved in and dying from crashes, we are unable to effectively target resources so that no life is lost, and no injury is sustained from someone involved in a preventable crash.

I strongly support HB 1324. By passing this bill, Maryland will be a national leader in examining racial and ethnic disparities in crashes. Understanding these data can help to not only reduce disparities in crashes, but also ensure that traffic enforcements are not unintentionally targeting populations in racially disparate ways.

[1] https://cdan.nhtsa.gov/SASStoredProcess/guest