



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony in Support of HB178
Vehicle Laws - Reckless Driving, Speed Contests, Registration Plates, and Noise Abatement -
Penalties

Testimony by Delegate Vaughn Stewart
January 21, 2021 • Environment and Transportation Committee

Starting from the early days of the pandemic, constituents flooded my office and Facebook inbox with reports of speeding motorcycles and cars near their homes. These motorists have been taking advantage of the relatively empty roadways to engage in the irresponsible hobby of speed racing. But this problem isn't confined to only my community, or only my county. Marylanders across the state have witnessed accidents and very close calls, and spent nights thinking about the inevitable loss of life.

In response, we collaborated with the Maryland Highway Safety coalition and a few local police officers to craft this bill. It includes a few changes designed to make it easier for these officers to do their jobs and crack down on dangerous driving. HB178 will deter this reckless behavior by making three changes to state law.

First, the bill would make it illegal to knowingly obscure a license plate for the purposes of evading speed detection. The fine would be \$500. The provision is in response to the proliferation of driving using reflective shields over their license plates to avoid camera detection. These shields are available on Amazon for \$30, and are the tool of choice for speed racers. Second, the bill would enhance penalties for motorists who engage in reckless driving and speed contests. Maximum fines would increase to \$1,000, and motorists would be required to appear in court to pay the fine.

Finally, the bill tackles the related issue of modifying an exhaust system. The motorists engaged in these reckless racing contests almost uniformly drive vehicles with modified exhaust systems. Under current law, modifying an exhaust system in a way that makes it louder than the factory version is a violation subject to a \$70 fine, which we initially proposed to increase to \$200. In response, we heard from several affected hobbyists dissatisfied with the current law, and we have crafted a sponsor

amendment to address their concerns. In the amended form, the bill would make the current prohibition on modified exhaust systems easier to enforce while increasing the fine to \$200 and exempting historic cars. Taken together, this part of the bill will help law enforcement crack down on these motorists while respecting law-abiding hobbyists.

I'm grateful to Colonel Kevin Anderson and the highway safety coalition members for their input and support throughout the year. It's been a privilege to work together on this bill to deter dangerous driving and improve highway safety. I urge a favorable report.