



Auto Consumer Alliance

13900 Laurel Lakes Avenue, Suite 100
Laurel, MD 20707

**Testimony to the House Environment and Transportation Committee
HB 335 – Maryland Transportation Authority –
E-Z Pass – Disputes of Charges and Fees –
Position: Favorable**

The Honorable Kumar Barve
Environment and Transportation Committee
Room 251, House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401
cc: Members, Environment and Transportation Committee

March 3, 2022

Honorable Chair Barve and Members of the Committee:

I'm a consumer advocate and Executive Director of Consumer Auto, a nonprofit group that works for safety, transparency, and fair treatment for Maryland drivers and car buyers.

Consumer Auto supports **HB 335** because it would give Maryland drivers a more full and fair opportunity to contest some of the millions of E-Z Pass charges belatedly arriving on their doorsteps.

As is well-known, MdTA's sudden transition to cash-less tolling and its decision to put a hold on video tolling fees for about eight months during the pandemic caused a huge backlog of toll charges to accumulate. MDTA also paused posting toll transactions for the Inter County Connector for some months in July 2020 because of concerns about the accuracy of its tolling.

As a consequence, in addition to issuing current charges, the MDTA has said it will be working at least until mid- 2022 to send out a backlog of 23 million toll fee notices it began to issue in Oct. 2020. Many drivers are now receiving large monthly bills for fees they incurred many months ago – fees they may not remember or find difficult to verify. In recent months, the EZ-Pass service center has been overwhelmed by many thousands of calls each day from frustrated drivers, who often have to wait two hours or more to speak with someone about their charges.

The state's Sept. 2021 audit revealing many thousands of billing errors at the MdTA's five cash-less tolling sites of course also raises further questions about the reliability of many of these charges.

Given Maryland's rather high fees for toll violations, unpaid toll charges can quickly turn into significant debts for Maryland drivers. And since Maryland is one the few states that still suspends vehicle registrations over toll debts, those charges can even imperil a person's ability to drive.

Expanding the time Marylanders have to challenge those fees from 120 days to one year -- as this bill (as the sponsor intends to amend it) would do – indeed would give drivers a much fairer opportunity to contest and correct some of these charges.

We support HB 335 and ask you to give it a FAVORABLE report.

Sincerely,
Franz Schneiderman
Consumer Auto