



Howard County Council

Deb Jung
Councilmember

District 4

George Howard Building
3430 Court House Drive
Ellicott City, Maryland 21043-4392

February 15, 2024

HB 601
Deb Jung, Howard County Council
FAVORABLE

Dear Chair Delegate Marc Korman, Vice Delegate Regina Boyce, and Environment and Transportation Committee Members:

I strongly support HB 601 Street Racing and Exhibition Driving – Prohibited Acts, Enforcement, and Penalties. Thank you to Delegate Lehman and other sponsoring Delegates for introducing this much needed bill for local jurisdictions in Maryland.

Drag racing and exhibition driving increased during the COVID quarantine and have since become commonplace in many communities. Meet ups are planned via social media and large groups of cars gather to race down major State and local roads. Pop up events for exhibition driving occurs in local parking lots at all hours of the day and with parked cars and pedestrians present. Local police aren't able to respond quickly enough before the cars disperse.

As a Councilmember in Howard County, I am aware that most residents would welcome increased penalties for this type of activity. Complaints about loud engines and car racing frequently fill my Council inbox and were one of the most common concerns I heard when I was door knocking during my reelection campaign. My Councilmanic District is bounded by Route 29 and Route 108 and is bisected by Route 32. Loud engine noise and car racing is a frequent occurrence on these roads. I know this because I hear it from Route 32 in my home almost every night. Pop-up events in the parking lots at the Columbia Mall and our Village Centers resulted in property damage.

On August 8, 2022, one of our Columbia Village Boards held a town hall to discuss cars with modified engines racing through neighborhoods, car rallies disturbing the peace at local shopping centers, and illegal street racing. I attended the meeting as a panelist, as did other elected officials, the Howard County Police Chief Der, and Police Major Justin Baker, who directs field operations.

Former State Delegate Reid Novotny, another panelist that evening, related an incident he witnessed when returning home on Route 32 one evening with his child. He and nearby cars were brought to a stop by drag racers for an impromptu car race on the State highway. Needless to say, he expressed concern about the safety of his child during a routine trip home.

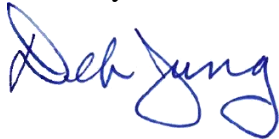
Chief Der stated that the problem of car rallies started in October 2020 and that in May 2021 police throughout the state started working cooperatively because the situation had escalated. Chief Der noted that the police monitor social media for rally locations to prevent gatherings designed to disturb the peace and endanger public safety. Major Baker stated that the most effective deterrent at present is the equipment repair order, which requires modified exhaust systems to be restored to factory settings. The police in attendance that night felt that any increased penalties or powers would help improve responses to the calls that they get.

At the end of the town hall, the panel discussed the 2022 General Assembly bill that would have given police the ability to impound on site but that bill was vetoed by then Governor Hogan. The following year, Senator Beidle introduced SB147, which also failed.

Our County Police Department has used the existing capabilities available to curtail this dangerous behavior, but the Department has expressed the need for more tools to be successful. I urge all of you to vote in favor of HB 601.

Thank your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Deb Jung
Council Chair, District 4