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March 20, 2024

The Honorable Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk  
Chair, House Health and Government Operations Committee  
241 House Office Building  
Annapolis MD 21401

***RE: Letter of Support as Amended - Senate Bill 267 - Motor Vehicle Administration -  
Death Certificates - Issuance of Copies***

Dear Chair Pena-Melnyk and Committee Members:

The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) supports Senate Bill 267 as amended as a pro-customer service reform allowing one-stop government services under one roof.

Senate Bill 267 allows the Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA) to issue an official death certificate copy for a customer needing one during an eligible transaction.

Current Maryland law requires an applicant to produce a death certificate to change ownership of a vehicle in the case of a deceased owner remaining on the title following that owner's passing. Since 2021, the MVA has processed nearly 26,333 title transfers. While exact numbers are not available of customers who specifically arrive at an MVA branch and are required to reschedule their visit after realizing they are missing the required death certificate to complete their re-titling transaction, it is an incredibly challenging time for any individual and this additional paperwork and time simply adds to their grief. In reviewing title transfers completed since 2021, 1,464 of the title transfers were done at branches that offer birth certificate printing. Extending death certificate printing at branches will prevent customers needing to reschedule these title transactions in the almost daily instances where the needed document was forgotten.

Extending this service to death certificates will provide the same premier customer service-oriented reform as the previous birth certificate enabling legislation (Chapter 526, Senate Bill 38, Acts of Maryland 2018). That law allowing birth certificates to be purchased at MVA branches by customers requiring one for certain transactions has assisted almost 4,000 Marylanders to date in obtaining a certified birth certificate copy for their records. This proposed legislation will ensure the MVA's customers who forget these required documents, or need to still obtain one, do not need to make additional government office appointments and avoid the need to make a return visit to an MVA branch office to complete their transaction. This seamless experience will enhance their satisfaction with government services and avoid straining MVA resources required for repeat visits for the same service.

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In the circumstances where an applicant forgets or does not have a death certificate with them for their retitling appointment, the applicant must either return home or go to either the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) or a local health office to obtain the necessary official death certificate before again returning to the MVA to complete their title transaction. This bill would give the MVA the authority to access the MDH database to retrieve the necessary information to produce the death certificate for the applicant. It is anticipated that full implementation would be phased in over time. All security and audit requirements to provide this service would be implemented with MDH approval prior to service availability. The MVA has put its own additional measure in place of having internal auditing staff review the issuance processes of birth certificates, and that is in addition to the MDH auditors who provide audits on the birth certificate program. The MVA would implement the same procedure with the death certificate program.

For these reasons, the Maryland Department of Transportation respectfully requests the Committee grant Senate Bill 267 as amended, a favorable report.

Respectfully submitted,

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