



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Public Testimony on SB155 Noise Abatement Monitoring Systems

Noise from vehicles with illegally modified exhaust systems or muffler problems is a growing problem in communities across the state. Overly loud vehicles are a quality-of-life concern for community members, especially those adjacent to multi-lane highways where racing engines can be heard blocks away.

For these reasons, I am introducing SB155, which would enable counties and municipalities within Montgomery, Anne-Arundel, and Prince George's Counties to use noise abatement monitoring systems to automatically detect vehicles in violation of state motor vehicle noise requirements. By using noise cameras, counties, and municipalities can address excessive noise concerns without increasing traffic stops by law enforcement.

Maryland and federal regulations both establish a maximum sound limit of 80 decibels for vehicles sold and operating on our state's roads. Under current law, it's illegal to modify a vehicle's exhaust system or to operate a vehicle that exceeds this threshold. These laws exist because excessive noise negatively affects the health of humans and animals, including increased risk of hearing damage, elevated blood pressure, higher stress levels, stroke, and dementia, in addition to being a public nuisance.

Although state law currently allows for police to ticket excessively loud vehicles, enforcement is difficult. Most police officers are not equipped with decibel meters and many police departments don't want to increase traffic stops.

New technology is emerging to automatically detect excessively loud vehicles and to send the vehicle owner a citation. Noise cameras work similarly to speed cameras, with technology placed adjacent to a road that can measure the loudness of each vehicle that drives past. If a vehicle exceeds 80 decibels, the noise camera is triggered to take a picture of the license plate of the offending vehicle.

The cameras are sophisticated enough to recognize the difference between different types of sound by monitoring the noise pattern. As such, these noise cameras can specifically look for noise caused by illegally modified exhaust pipes and mufflers.

Several states and cities have taken action to authorize and start using noise cameras. New York City has been using noise cameras for more than 2 years and is rapidly expanding its program across its boroughs. Their program has been very successful in detecting cars with illegally modified exhaust systems and getting vehicles into compliance with the law. In its pilot phase, New York used just one camera and caught over 500 violators. They recently added 7 new cameras and anticipate having up to 100 cameras by 2028.

Knoxville, Tennessee started a pilot program in February 2022 and has since decided to continue the use of noise cameras. Albuquerque, New Mexico is moving ahead with sound cameras. Washington, DC, and Miami Beach, Florida are considering the use of noise cameras. Worldwide, several jurisdictions currently use or will soon be deploying noise cameras, including in Paris, Taipei, the United Kingdom, and Australia.

This bill is modeled after Maryland's speed camera program and includes the same legislative safeguards:

- Enables local governments to use sound cameras to catch illegally loud vehicles.
- A local government would need to authorize the use of the sound cameras, after public notice and holding at least one public hearing.
- Before each sound camera could be installed, the local government would need to provide public notice about the proposed location of the camera and install a sign near the camera that indicates that noise abatement monitoring is happening in the area.
- An employee of the local government must review each citation.
- For the first offense, a warning must be issued.
 - For subsequent offenses, a citation is mailed for a civil penalty of up to \$70—the same penalty if a law enforcement officer issues the violation.
 - No points can be assessed.
- A vehicle owner who receives a citation can either pay it or contest it in court.
- Rental car companies are exempted, as they are under the speed camera law.
- The camera vendor's fee cannot be contingent on a per-ticket basis.

For these reasons, I seek a favorable committee report on SB155.