

# OFFICE OF THE STATE'S ATTORNEY

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ST. MARY'S COUNTY, MARYLAND

January 29, 2025

The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr.  
Chairman, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee  
11 Bladen Street  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Chairman Smith and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee:

As the State's Attorney for St. Mary's County, I write in strong support of SB0364 - Criminal Law - Manslaughter by Vehicle or Vessel - Increased Penalties (Jamari's Law).

In 2022, Jamari Duckett, an 18-year-old recent high school graduate with aspirations of becoming a mechanical engineer, was tragically killed in St. Mary's County by a drunk driver traveling at speeds between 76- and 91-mph in a 40-mph zone. The driver was prosecuted and sentenced to ten years in prison, the maximum penalty allowable by law.

Because Maryland categorizes vehicular manslaughter as a *non-violent* offense, the Defendant is eligible for parole after serving just a quarter of his sentence, which is just *two and a half years*. This outcome does not reflect the severity of the crime or the value of Jamari's life.

SB0364 seeks to correct this injustice by increasing the maximum penalty for manslaughter by vehicle from ten to twenty years and for repeat offenders, fifteen to thirty years. The increase in penalties provides prosecutors, the defense, and the Court the ability to achieve all of the goals of sentencing—deterrence, rehabilitation, and punishment—rather than having to choose just one.

While my office fights to secure justice for victims and their families, we are constrained by the limits of current sentencing laws. The passage of SB0364 will provide prosecutors with stronger tools to hold offenders accountable and send a message that the lives lost to these preventable tragedies are worth more than the inadequate penalties currently in place.

I have been a steadfast advocate for vehicular homicide victims and their families throughout my career, and I will continue to fight for stronger protections under the law. I strongly urge a favorable report on SB0364.

Respectfully,

Jaymi Sterling  
State's Attorney for St. Mary's County