



**Auto Consumer Alliance**  
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**Testimony to the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee  
SB 742 -- Vehicle Laws-- Inspection Requirement  
Position: Favorable**

The Honorable Will Smith  
Judicial Proceedings Committee  
2 East, Miller Senate Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401  
cc: Members, Judicial Proceedings Committee

March 5, 2025

**Dear Chairman Smith and Committee Members,**

I'm a consumer advocate and Executive Director of Consumer Auto, a non-profit group that works for safety, transparency, and fair treatment for Maryland drivers and consumers.

We support **SB 742** because it promises to improve vehicle safety and prevent some of the thousands of crashes on state roads each year caused by vehicle defects. By requiring a mechanical review of key safety systems of cars that are at least six old every two years, the legislation will give drivers an opportunity to fix unsafe brakes, steering systems and other components before they cause someone to get hurt. In in many cases, this will also prevent relatively small issues from growing into much more serious problems that may cost drivers thousands to repair or force them to replace their vehicle earlier than they had planned (which is likely to be even more costly).

With the average vehicle on U.S roads now a record 12.6 years old, and the average passenger car now 14 years old,<sup>1</sup> the safety of older cars, in particular, is certainly a serious public safety concern. Experts estimate that about one in five cars on U.S. roads today – or about 58.1 million cars – carry defects that are serious enough to have prompted a recall but have not been repaired.<sup>2</sup> And millions more cars are driving on worn brakes or other deteriorated systems that pose safety risks to others on the road.

The Maryland State Police reports that Maryland had 10,127 car crashes caused by vehicle equipment failure between 2017 and 2019. That number represents about 3% of the crashes in Maryland in those years. It also represents tens of thousands of Marylanders put at risk by crashes that could have been prevented with more careful attention to vehicle safety.

The Maryland figures are consistent with data from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) that suggest 2 to 7 percent of crashes are caused by equipment defects.

Many factors affect road safety and crash frequency, of course, and it is difficult to establish a direct correlation between vehicle inspections and crash rates. However, the most comprehensive study on the issue I am aware of, a 2015 review of the effectiveness of state vehicle safety

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.caranddriver.com/news/a60882953/average-age-us-cars-trucks-suvs-rises/>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.fox6now.com/news/1-5-vehicles-us-roads-unresolved-recall-how-to-check>



inspections by the General Accounting Office (GAO), did find that the inspections prompt important repairs of many thousands of cars each year in the states that conduct them. Its summary stresses that state officials strongly believe that “inspections help identify vehicles with safety problems and result in repair or removal of unsafe vehicles.”<sup>3</sup>

The GAO study showed, for instance, that in 2014 about 529,000 vehicles in Pennsylvania (which requires annual safety inspections) underwent repairs to pass inspection.<sup>4</sup> Virginia (which also requires an annual inspection) reported repair of more than 1.4 million cars – or about 19% of the vehicles in the state – to pass inspection that same year. Those repairs included about 700,000 cars that failed to pass inspection because of deficient brake components.<sup>5</sup>

That finding is important because brake problems can, of course, cause serious danger but -- unlike taillight or other failures that an officer might spot on the road and order a driver to repair – would not in the normal course of events be visible to a driver or a patrol officer. Periodic inspections give qualified mechanics the chance to look for such problems, and fix them before tragedy strikes.

This is part of the reason that most of our neighboring states already require annual or semi-annual vehicle inspections. That list includes Virginia, West Virginia, New York, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Massachusetts, and the District of Columbia. On the other hand, the only other state that joins Maryland in requiring inspections only when a car is sold or transferred is Alabama.

Creating a more robust inspection requirement for older vehicles that are likely to be showing serious wear and tear would improve vehicle safety and very likely reduce the number of crashes caused by mechanical defects across Maryland each year. It would also help extend the useful life of the older vehicles many low- and middle-income drivers rely on by prompting early repairs of potentially serious mechanical issues, before they mushroom into highly expensive repair projects.

**We support SB 742 and ask you to give it a FAVORABLE report.**

Sincerely,

Franz Schneiderman  
Consumer Auto

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-15-705-highlights.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-15-705.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.