

April 1, 2025

The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr.
Chair, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

***RE: Letter of Support – House Bill 470 – Vehicle Laws – Obscured, Modified, or Blocked
Registration Plates and Registration Plate Covers***

Dear Chair Smith and Committee Members:

The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) supports House Bill 470 and offers the following information for the Committee's consideration.

HB 470 prohibits a person from obscuring or modifying any vehicle registration plate in a manner that may prevent identification. The bill repeals the requirement for an officer to prove intent before issuing a citation for an obscured or modified registration plate. It is important to note that, as amended, the bill allows for enforcement of the prohibition against the driver only as a secondary offense. The amended bill also added provisions to target those who advertise or sell license plate covers under the false claim that they are legal in the State of Maryland. This provides an additional line of defense against illegal license plate covers.

The act of obscuring or modifying a vehicle registration plate is a moving violation regardless of a person's intent to obscure or modify the plate. With respect to the operations of the Maryland Transportation Authority's (MDTA) E-ZPass program, the act of obscuring or modifying a registration plate can result in lost revenue - the notice of tolls due may be sent to the incorrect customer, or a transaction may not take place due to a failure to identify the vehicle owner. The ability to capture registration plate details accurately and reliably allows MDTA to price transactions electronically for all road users. For motorists who opt not to open an electronic tolling account and use an on-board transponder (E-ZPass), license plate images (i.e., video tolls, Pay-By-Plate) are a means to charge drivers by capturing a license plate image, identifying the vehicle owner, and billing the owner for the toll charge.

The MDTA's tolling vendor reported 388,295 and 380,491 obstructed license plates in calendar years 2022 and 2023, respectively. For perspective, if the proposed legislation was effective in deterring this behavior, the MDTA would have collected approximately \$2 million in additional revenue in calendar year 2023 (assuming a \$6.16 average toll and an 84% collection rate). HB 470 helps to ensure that all Maryland motorists traversing State roads pay their fair share.

For these reasons, the Maryland Department of Transportation respectfully requests the Committee grant HB 470 a favorable report.

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Respectfully submitted,

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