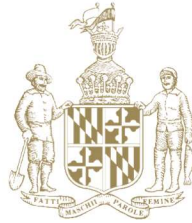


Howard & Montgomery Co Support HB470

Uploaded by: Delegate Ziegler Delegate Ziegler

Position: FAV



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Testimony in Support of HB 470
Vehicle Laws - Obscured or Modified Registration Plates**

Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and honorable members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee: Thank you for considering **HB 470 Vehicle Laws - Obscured or Modified Registration Plates**.

As amended, this bill aims to prevent the obscuring or modification of vehicle registration plates, as well as the sale and deceptive advertising of license plate covers designed for that purpose. Currently, obscuring or modifying a license plate is unlawful only if there is proven intent to avoid identification. This bill provides the simple fix of removing “intent” from that language – because regardless of intent, it is still the responsibility of a motorist to make sure their registration plates are legible. Under this bill, obscuring or modifying a license plate would be a secondary offense.

Obscured license plates have become an increasingly serious problem in Maryland. The MDTA’s tolling vendor reported more than 388,000 obstructed plates in 2022 and more than 380,000 in 2023. In 2023 alone, the MDTA estimated that it had lost approximately \$2 million in additional revenue due to plates being unreadable to tolling systems. Obscured or modified license plates also impede road safety enforcement measures such as red light and speeding cameras, as well as SILVER and AMBER alerts. This bill prioritizes the safety of Maryland motorists and makes it easier for our State and Local law enforcement to do their jobs effectively. MDOT is in full support. I urge a favorable report on HB 470, and ask that the Senate bill be conformed to the House bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Natalie Ziegler", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Delegate Natalie Ziegler
Howard & Montgomery Counties, District 9A

HB0470 - MDTA - LOS - Vehicle Laws - Obscured, Mod

Uploaded by: Patricia Westervelt

Position: FAV

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.

The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr.
Page Two

Respectfully submitted,

Bradley Ryon
Manager, Government Relations
Maryland Transportation Authority
410-387-5253

Matthew Mickler
Director of Government Affairs
Maryland Department of Transportation
410-865-1090

MCPA-MSA X HB 470- OBSCURED or MODIFIED REGISTRATI

Uploaded by: Samira Jackson

Position: FAV



Maryland Chiefs of Police Association

Maryland Sheriffs' Association



MEMORANDUM

TO: The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr., Chair and
Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Darren Popkin, Executive Director, MCPA-MSA Joint Legislative Committee
Andrea Mansfield, Representative, MCPA-MSA Joint Legislative Committee
Samira Jackson, Representative, MCPA-MSA Joint Legislative Committee

DATE: April 1, 2025

RE: HB 470 OBSCURED OR MODIFIED REGISTRATION PLATES

POSITION: SUPPORT

The Maryland Chiefs of Police Association (MCPA) and the Maryland Sheriffs' Association (MSA) **SUPPORT HB 470**. This bill requires the Motor Vehicle Administration Maryland (MVA) to offer to replace any vehicle registration plates that are more than 15 years old. In tandem, this bill prohibits vehicle owners from obscuring or modifying a vehicle's registration plate in a way that **may** avoid identification.

Under HB 470, the language alters the current prohibition against obscuring or modifying a vehicle registration plate *with the intent to avoid identification* to language that includes the prohibition of any activity that *may prevent identification*, thus broadening the scope of the regulation. The bill also requires that a person must be issued a warning for a first-time offense, which gives the person an opportunity to cure the violation without an immediate penalty or fine. This bill allows the Police Chiefs and Sheriffs (PMC/MS) to perform our jobs more effectively and prohibits behavior that would make it challenging to identify vehicles in violation of the law. Additionally, this bill increases the efficacy of vehicle infraction cameras throughout the state.

Furthermore, in 2024 the MVA noted that there were at least 121,642 Class A and Class M vehicles with plates eligible to be replaced under the bill that are more than 15 years old. About 75% (91,319) were issued between 15 and 19 years ago, while the remaining plates (30,323) were issued 20 or more years ago. MVA estimates that as many as 50% of eligible vehicle owners (60,821) will take advantage of the opportunity to receive a set of replacement plates.

This bill would help to ensure that law enforcement, and law enforcement resources, can visibly see vehicle registration without obstruction. The bill amends the penalties for an obstructed or modified registration plate, allowing a person guilty of a violation an opportunity to remedy the obstruction or modification prior to assessing points against their license. For these reasons, MCPA and MSA **SUPPORT HB 470** and urge a **FAVORABLE** committee report.

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Westminster, Maryland 21157
667-314-3216 / 667-314-3236