

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2008 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Revised

Senate Bill 276

(Senator Stone, *et al.*)

Judicial Proceedings

Environmental Matters

Maryland Quiet Vehicles and Pedestrian Safety Task Force

This bill establishes the Maryland Quiet Vehicles and Pedestrian Safety Task Force, staffed by the Maryland Department of Transportation. The task force is charged with studying the effects of vehicle sound on pedestrian safety and all available technology that may enhance the safety of blind pedestrians. The bill also establishes a reporting requirement.

The bill takes effect June 1, 2008 and terminates December 31, 2008.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Any expense reimbursements for task force members and staffing costs are assumed to be minimal and absorbable within existing resources.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary: The task force has to:

- study the effects of vehicle sound on pedestrian safety;
- review available research on the effects of vehicle sound on pedestrian safety and consult with consumer groups and safety advocates;

- conduct hearings to accept testimony from experts and the public; and
- make recommendations regarding a minimum sound level, the nature and characteristics of the minimum sound that should be required for all new vehicles sold and licensed in Maryland, and the use of technology to enhance the safety of blind pedestrians.

The task force has to submit a report by December 31, 2008 to the General Assembly.

Current Law: The Maryland Vehicle Law contains provisions establishing maximum limits for vehicle noise, but except for specified equipment such as a horn, minimum noise levels are generally not addressed. Horns are required equipment on motor vehicles and must emit a sound audible under normal conditions from a distance of at least 200 feet, but they may not be unreasonably loud or harsh. A driver is permitted to use the car horn to ensure safe operation of a vehicle but otherwise may not use the horn.

Background: Organizations representing visually impaired persons, such as the National Federal for the Blind, and traffic safety advocates have expressed concerns about the production of electric and hybrid motor vehicles. The vehicles are so quiet that it could be difficult for someone, but especially a person who is blind or visually impaired, to detect their presence.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: HB 1160 (Delegate Malone, *et al.*) – Environmental Matters.

Information Source(s): Maryland Department of Transportation, Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - February 15, 2008
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