



**Testimony in Support of HB38  
Vehicle Laws – Failure to Pay Video Toll – Reform of Penalties  
Thursday, February 6, 2020**

TO: The Honorable Kumar Barve, Chair; The Honorable Dana Stein, Vice Chair; and Members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee

FROM: Laura E. Irwin, Chair, Montgomery County Community Action Board

The Montgomery County Community Action Board, the County's federally designated anti-poverty group, strongly supports HB38, which addresses a policy that disproportionately impact lower-income residents. Currently, those who do not pay video tolls, often because they cannot afford an EZ Pass transponder, receive a bill in the mail. If the driver does not pay within 30 days, this toll of a few dollars skyrockets to a \$50 penalty. Such fines can add up very quickly and place a person deeper in debt. Failure to pay these fines may also result in suspension of a person's vehicle registration, preventing the person from driving to work and earning an income.

Here in Montgomery County, where the cost of living is so high, video toll fines are just one of many challenges facing lower-income residents. The Self-Sufficiency Standard, which measures the actual cost of living in a given geographic location, for a Montgomery County family of three with one adult, one infant, and one preschooler is over \$103,000 – nearly four times the County's minimum wage income.<sup>1</sup> Many individuals who are struggling to pay for basic necessities such as housing, childcare, and food, simply cannot afford to pay exorbitant fines for tolls, and having their vehicle registration suspended could mean losing a job that requires a long commute, especially when no public transportation options are available.

This issue is exacerbated for many lower-income people who need to move frequently due to lack of affordable housing and may not receive bills in the first place. This is also an equity issue for diverse areas such as Montgomery County where over 141,000 residents speak English "less than very well", resulting in many drivers not being able to read English well.<sup>2</sup> By reducing these fines to a more reasonable amount of \$5 and preventing the MVA from suspending vehicle registrations for failure to pay such fines, HB38 would help to break the cycle of poverty for many lower-income Marylanders.

We strongly encourage the Committee to pass this bill and to continue to support policies that eliminate barriers to self-sufficiency for all residents.

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<sup>1</sup> Self-Sufficiency Standard <http://www.selfsufficiencystandard.org/>

<sup>2</sup> 2017 American Community Survey <https://www.census.gov/>