



Auto Consumer Alliance

13900 Laurel Lakes Avenue, Suite 100
Laurel, MD 20707

**Testimony to the House Environment and Transportation Committee
HB 38 – Vehicle Laws – Failure to Pay Video Toll – Reform of Penalties –
Position: Favorable**

Feb. 6, 2020

The Honorable Kumar Barve
Environment and Transportation Committee
Room 251, House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401
cc: Members, Environment and Transportation Committee

Honorable Chair Barve and Members of the Committee:

I'm a consumer advocate and Executive Director of Consumer Auto, a group that brings together consumer-friendly auto dealers and consumer advocates to work for safety, transparency, and fair treatment for Maryland drivers and car buyers.

Consumer Auto supports **HB 38** because we believe the existing system of toll violation fines and suspensions of vehicle registrations over relatively small toll debts is unduly punitive – especially for lower-income drivers who can quickly fall into debt traps as a result of Maryland's high fines and aggressive collection practices. Dramatically reducing the fines and ending the practice of suspending registrations over toll fines would ease that debt burden and prevent those who struggle to pay their fines from facing still greater legal difficulties when some of them continue to drive (on suspended tags) to get to work and meet the needs of their families.

These fines and suspensions impact a quite significant number of Marylanders. Since 2014, the MdTA has put a hold on the renewal of vehicle registrations of more than 207,000 Marylanders and between 2015-18 22,000 of us had our vehicle tags suspended because of toll violations. If our current policies continue, those numbers will likely grow sharply as the MDTA moves to convert more of our toll roads and bridges to cashless operation and as Gov. Hogan pushes for more toll lanes on our Beltways and I-270. More cashless toll collection, in particular, will very likely result in more fines assessed to those (often lower-income Marylanders) who lack an EZ Pass transponder, or as a result of EZ Pass system failure, or slow EZ Pass billing, or of drivers neglecting to properly replenish their accounts.

For too many Marylanders, these fines quickly mount into serious financial issues – that rapidly create a debt trap and a threat to the vehicle registrations they need to maintain to be able to get to work, pursue their education, or access the services and supports they and their families need.

Only five other states now suspend vehicle registrations for outstanding toll violations. Maryland can provide some relief to hard-pressed residents by reducing our civil fines for toll violations and joining the 44 states that DON'T suspend registrations for toll fines.

I urge you to give a **FAVORABLE report to HB 38.**

Sincerely,
Franz Schneiderman
Consumer Auto