



**Testimony for the House Environment and Transportation  
Committee**

**February 13, 2020**

**HB 200 Vehicle Laws - Registration Plate Frames and Borders –  
Enforcement**

**FAVORABLE**

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The ACLU of Maryland supports HB 200, which changes the law banning the placement of an object framing or bordering the edges of a registration plate from a primary offense to a secondary offense. Under secondary enforcement, a police officer may not issue a citation to a driver for violating this provision unless the police officer has first detained the driver for another suspected violation of State law.

The current law in Maryland allows law enforcement to stop individuals under the pre-text of violating the registration plate provision, in an effort to search the vehicle and driver for evidence of more serious offenses. Under §13–411 of the Transportation Article, vehicle registration plates must be maintained free from foreign materials (including registration plate covers) and in a condition to be clearly legible and securely fastened to the vehicle for which it is issued (1) in a horizontal position; (2) in a manner that prevents the plate from swinging; and (3) in a place and position to be clearly visible.

According to the Race-Based Traffic Stops Dashboard on the Governor's Office on Crime Control and Prevention website, in 2018, 48.2% of persons stopped for registration-related offenses were Black, although Black Marylanders make up less than 30% of the state's population. Worse, Black and Latinx Marylanders who were stopped for registration-related offenses were disproportionately issued citations—42.3% of Black and 40.3% of Latinx Marylanders stopped were cited, as compared with 31.6% of White Marylanders. The statistics demonstrate that the offense at issue is being disparately applied to persons of color.

Making this offense—which poses little to no public safety threat—to a secondary offense leaves it in place to serve as a matter of safety, instead of being used for pretextual stops.

For the foregoing reasons, the ACLU of Maryland urges a favorable report on HB 200.