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SB199 -- Vehicle Laws - Overtaking and Passing Bicycles

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
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Sterling Stone, Board Chair
Bike Maryland
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Position: Support

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee. I am Sterling Stone the Board Chair for Bike Maryland. We represent cyclists of all abilities across the state who ride 5 miles around the park with their families, for transportation, to a 100 mile ride. We believe that all cyclists should feel safe when they ride. Bike Maryland has over 18,000 members from across the state.

I am also the Executive Director of Gearin' Up Bicycles whose purpose is to create career development opportunities and teach essential workplace skills to youth from underserved communities, while encouraging cycling as a practical, healthy means of transportation.

One of the scariest feelings as a cyclist is having a car drive so close that you can or feel you can reach out and touch the car as it passes. This is most likely to happen on two-lane roadways. Additionally, nearly all of us in the cycling community have either personally been or know someone who has been buzzed by a motorist or worse yet clipped and thrown from our bike.

The data supports this legislation. Since 2011, crashes involving cyclists resulting in serious injury or death are on the rise. 37.9 percent of these crashes occur when the bicyclist is riding in the same direction as the vehicle. The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety suggests that 45 percent of bicyclists deaths may be due to unsafe passing.

These studies clearly demonstrate the need to establish clear guidelines for motorists who need to safely pass a bicyclist or other slow-moving road user.

Our double-yellow line rules are in place so that cars travelling at roughly the same rate of speed know when it's safe to pass. Cyclists travel at much lower speeds, are shorter and narrower; and therefore motorists need much less roadway to safely pass. Therefore, motorists, can, taking the same precautions as they would to pass on a two-lane road, pass the cyclist safely.

Our neighbors have passed similar legislation. Pennsylvania requires 4 feet for safe passage. Delaware requires drivers to move into the other lane, much like Maryland's law requiring drivers to slow down and move over when encountering emergency vehicles.

When this bill was introduced two years ago, the Maryland State Police expressed concern over the language in that bill as it made the drivers discretion the basis for legality. The language in this bill has addressed that concern by adopting the same language as is applied in the law for turning right on red.

Bike Maryland's mission is to make Maryland's roads safe for cyclists and make Maryland's cyclists of all ages and abilities feel safe riding in Maryland. Please pass SB199.