



Auto Consumer Alliance
13900 Laurel Lakes Avenue, Suite 100
Laurel, MD 20707

Testimony to the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
SB 566 -- Vehicle Laws – Registration Renewal – Inspection Requirement
Position: Favorable

February 21, 2020

The Honorable Will Smith
Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East, Miller Senate Building
Annapolis, MD 21401
cc: Members, Judicial Proceedings Committee

Dear Chairman Smith and Committee Members,

I'm a consumer advocate and Executive Director of Consumer Auto, a non-profit group that works with consumer-friendly auto dealers and consumer advocates to advance safety, transparency, and fair treatment for Maryland dealers, drivers and car buyers.

We support **SB 566** because it promises to improve vehicle safety and prevent some of the thousands of crashes on state roads each year caused by vehicle defects. By requiring a meaningful review of many of the key safety systems of cars that are more than five years old every two years, the legislation will give drivers an opportunity to fix unsafe brakes, steering systems and other components before they cause someone to get hurt – at the modest cost of \$45 every two years for an inspection.

With the average age of a car on U.S. roads now at a record 11.8 years, the safety of older cars, in particular, is certainly a serious public safety concern. Experts estimate that about one in four cars on U.S. roads today – or about 63 million cars – carry defects that are serious enough to have prompted a recall but have not been repaired.¹ And millions more cars are driving on worn brakes or other deteriorated systems that pose safety risks to their drivers and others on the road.

The Maryland State Police reports that Maryland had 10,127 car crashes caused by vehicle equipment failure over the last three years (2017-19). That number represents about 3% of the crashes in Maryland in those years. It also represents tens of thousands of Marylanders put at risk by crashes that could have been prevented with more careful attention to vehicle safety.

Many factors affect road safety and crash frequency, of course, and it is difficult to establish a direct correlation between vehicle inspections and crash rates. A 2015 review of the effectiveness of vehicle safety inspections by the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration

¹ <https://wjla.com/features/7-on-your-side/record-number-of-vehicles-on-the-road-with-unrepaired-recalls>



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(NHTSA) did document, however, that the inspections prompt important repairs of many thousands of cars each year in the states that conduct them. NHTSA found that 2 to 7 percent of crashes are caused by car equipment defects. Its study also showed that in 2014 about 529,000 vehicles in Pennsylvania (which requires annual safety inspections) underwent repairs to pass inspection.² Virginia (which also requires an annual inspection) reported repair of more than 1.4 million cars – or about 19% of the vehicles in the state – to pass inspection that same year. Those repairs included about 700,000 cars that failed to pass inspection because of deficient brake components.³

That finding is important because brake problems can, of course, cause serious danger but -- unlike taillight or other failures that an officer might spot on the road and order a driver to repair – would not in the normal course of events be visible to a driver or a patrol officer. Periodic inspections provide an important opportunity to bring such problems to the attention of a qualified mechanic and get them fixed before tragedy strikes.

This is part of the reason that most of our neighboring states already require annual or semi-annual vehicle inspections. That list includes Virginia, West Virginia, New York, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Massachusetts, and the District of Columbia. Indeed in Virginia the governor this year made an effort to rollback that annual inspection requirement – but concerns about the harm to vehicle safety have helped cause that initiative to stall in the Richmond legislature.

The only other state that joins Maryland in requiring inspections only when a car is sold or transferred is Alabama. Bringing a more robust inspection requirement to our state would improve vehicle safety and very likely reduce the number of crashes caused by mechanical defects across Maryland each year.

Consumer Auto supports **HB 566** and urge the committee to give it a **FAVORABLE** report.

Sincerely,

Franz Schneiderman
Consumer Auto

2 <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-15-705.pdf>

3 Ibid.