



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 291

Vehicle Laws - Failure to Pay Video Toll - Outstanding Fines

Environment and Transportation Committee

January 21, 2021

Submitted by Stacey Jefferson and Julia Gross, Co-Chairs

Member Agencies:

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Marylanders Against Poverty

Stacey Jefferson, Co-Chair
P: 410-637-1900 ext 8578
C: 443-813-9231

E: stacey.jefferson@bhsbaltimore.org

Julia Gross, Co-Chair
P: 410-528-0021x6029

E: jgross@mdhungersolutions.org

Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) supports HB 291. This bill changes the civil penalty of unpaid toll violations from \$50 to \$25.

This system makes it difficult for many low-income drivers to pay their debts. Currently, there is a \$50 civil penalty that is applied to each transaction if it is not paid within a certain time frame. Then, the balance is moved to Maryland's Central Collection Unit (CCU). Once it is moved, there is another fee added to the total amount. There has to be an initial down payment made before monthly payments can start.

Cashless toll roads create this problem, because drivers do not have the option to pay the toll during their trip. This can lead to drivers accruing extremely high cost very quickly. Drivers can enter into this situation in multiple ways. The drivers EZ Pass responder could stop working, and they are unaware that they are accruing video toll fees. They may not have a bank account linked to their account to auto replenish. They may not receive proper notification from MVA of the video toll fees that they owe. These mistakes can lead to low income drivers being trapped into a system of debt.

Lowering the penalty fine will decrease the financial burden experienced by low income drivers. Low income drivers have many financial obligations in relation to driving. These include car insurance, maintenance, and tolls, and having access to a car expands job and educational opportunities. Driving and having a car is already an expensive burden on low income family's budget. One trip can result in \$100 in penalty fines because the fine is charged per transaction. \$100 in fines for one trip is detrimental to low income families. Lowering the fine makes it easier for low income families pay. This in turn increases the number of low income families that will pay. This will help them avoid further escalation due to unpaid violations.

MAP appreciates your consideration and urges a favorable report for support HB 291.

Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) is a coalition of service providers, faith communities, and advocacy organizations advancing statewide public policies and programs necessary to alleviate the burdens faced by Marylanders living in or near poverty, and to address the underlying systemic causes of poverty.