Written Testimony submitted by Keshia M. Pollack Porter, PhD, MPH
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Before the Maryland House Environment and Transportation Committee
in **STRONG SUPPORT** of
House Bill 285: Workgroup on Statewide Vehicle Crash Data Collection and Reporting
January 19, 2021

Good afternoon Chairperson Barve and members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee. My name is Dr. Keshia Pollack Porter and I am a Professor in the Department of Health Policy and Management at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and Director of Research at the Johns Hopkins Center for Injury Research and Policy. I am an international expert in injury prevention, transportation, policy, and health equity. I am a strong proponent for having data systems that allow us to fully understand problems and reduce the burden on populations that are disproportionately impacted, and strongly support House Bill (HB) 285.

HB 285 establishes the Workgroup on Statewide Vehicle Crash Data Collection and Reporting, which will examine the processes used to collect and report statewide vehicle crash data for injuries and fatalities; the categories into which the statewide vehicle crash data are disaggregated and reported; and determine the most effective manner for the State to begin to collect, disaggregate, and report by race and ethnicity statewide vehicle crash data for injuries and fatalities. This bill is critically important for the State, and below are three reasons why race and ethnicity data should be included in Maryland crash data.

First, motor vehicles crashes are one of the leading causes of death in the U.S., accounting for over 39,000 deaths in 2019 alone. In Maryland, 530 people died from a traffic fatality in 2019; up 3% from 2018.[1] Motor vehicle crashes remains a leading public health problem. The public health burden of these crashes is significant in terms of lives lost, disability, and cost to the health care system. Despite reduced driving levels because of the pandemic, preliminary data indicate that people continued to die on the roads in 2020.

Second, we need accurate data to promote traffic safety. The website for the Maryland Department of Transportation states that "crash data are an essential component in identifying and defining roadway safety problems…When properly understood, analyzed and used, crash data are a powerful asset to any highway safety program." Currently, the Maryland Highway Safety Office's annual report aggregates crash data by the characteristics of the individuals and vehicles involved in a crash, as well as the characteristics of the roadway. Characteristics of the individuals involved in the crash include drivers' age and gender, seatbelt use, and whether alcohol was involved; data on race or ethnicity are not collected. By not determining the race and ethnicity of people involved in crashes, important disparities continue to go unreported and unnoticed.

Third, people of color are disproportionately affected by pedestrian and bicycle crashes; however, Maryland does not collect or record racial or ethnic data in vehicle crash reports. This bill would provide the means to study the best way to collect crash data by race and ethnicity to inform the development of data-informed policies that reduce these racial and ethnic injury and fatality disparities. This Workgroup will include key agencies that can work together to develop a data collection strategy that is effective, pragmatic, and feasible.

I strongly support HB 285. By passing this bill, Maryland will be a national leader in examining racial and ethnic disparities in crashes. Collecting race and ethnicity data can help to reduce important inequities in state crash and crash-related deaths, and help all people on Maryland roadways travel safely.

I submit this testimony as an expert and public health professional and concerned resident of Maryland. I am not representing the view or position of the Johns Hopkins University or Bloomberg School of Public Health.

[1] https://catalog.data.gov/dataset/maryland-statewide-vehicle-crashes