



Auto Consumer Alliance

13900 Laurel Lakes Avenue, Suite 100
Laurel, MD 20707

**Testimony to the House Environment and Transportation Committee
HB 346 – Vehicle Laws – Failure to Pay Video Toll – Reform of Penalties –
Position: Favorable**

Jan. 14, 2021

The Honorable Kumar Barve
Environment and Transportation Committee
Room 251, House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401
cc: Members, Environment and Transportation Committee

Honorable Chair Barve and Members of the Committee:

I'm a consumer advocate and Executive Director of Consumer Auto, a group that brings together consumer-friendly auto dealers and consumer advocates to work for safety, transparency, and fair treatment for Maryland drivers and car buyers.

Consumer Auto supports **HB 346** because we believe Maryland's existing practice of suspending vehicle registrations over relatively small toll debts is unduly punitive – especially for lower-income drivers who can quickly fall into debt traps as a result of Maryland's high fines and aggressive collection practices. Discontinuing the practice of suspending registrations as a result of those fines would relieve some of that pressure – and also prevent some of those who struggle to pay these fines from facing still greater legal difficulties as they continue to drive (on suspended tags) to get to work and meet their other needs.

These suspensions impact a great many Marylanders. Between 2015 and 2018, the MdTA put a hold on the renewal of vehicle registrations of more than 207,000 Marylanders and about 22,000 Marylanders had their vehicle tags suspended because of toll violations. The state's move to all-cashless tolling will very likely result in more fines assessed to those (often lower-income Marylanders) who lack an EZ Pass transponder – or as a result of EZ Pass system failure, slow EZ Pass billing, or drivers neglecting to properly replenish their accounts.

For too many Marylanders, these fines quickly become a kind of financial quicksand. They create a debt trap and a threat to the vehicle registrations they need to maintain to be able to get to work, pursue their education, or access the services and supports they and their families need.

Only eight states now suspend or revoke vehicle registrations for outstanding toll violations. Maryland can provide relief to hard-pressed residents by reducing our civil fines for toll violations and joining the 42 states that DO NOT suspend or revoke registrations for toll fines.

I urge you to give a **FAVORABLE** report to **HB 346**.

Sincerely,

Franz Schneiderman
Consumer Auto