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Committee: Judicial Proceedings

Testimony on: SB 179 - “Distracted Driving Monitoring Systems – Authorization”

Position: Support

Hearing Date: January 27, 2021

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club supports SB 179, which would authorize certain state agencies to place distracted driver monitoring systems on certain highways. The bill would require that these systems record two or more photographs of the driver as well as the registration plate number of the motor vehicle. The driver or owner of the motor vehicle whose image shows cell phone use while driving would be subject to a civil penalty of not more than \$500.

Transportation is now the primary contributor to greenhouse gas emissions in our state. Tailpipe emissions from cars and trucks are also a major source of health-damaging air pollution. This means there is growing need to get individuals out of their cars, and taking transit, riding bikes, and walking more. However, biking and walking along busy roads is not as safe as it should be, and a major reason for that is too many drivers use their cell phones while driving.

We live in a car-centric culture where transportation planning, road infrastructure and vehicle laws are focused on getting vehicles to their destinations as swiftly as possible. Unfortunately, the use of cell phones for texting or calls while driving has become part of that culture. It has been made illegal, but enforcement cannot keep up with the frequency of the offense on our roadways. As a result, too many drivers as well as pedestrians, bicyclists and others lawfully operating on or beside the road are seriously injured or killed.

This bill could help bring about needed change. It incorporates distracted driving monitoring systems into the legal framework that already exists for speed monitoring systems and other electronic methods for monitoring driver behavior, capturing violations of traffic laws and punishing them through an existing system of civil fines. Hopefully, distracted driving monitoring systems would lead to more detection and enforcement of bans on cell phone use while driving and thus to safer roads for other drivers, bikers, and pedestrians.

In summary, this bill would address a significant problem on our roadways, and we urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on it.

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Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America’s oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 75,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has over 800,000 members and nearly four million supporters.