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Advance Testimony to Maryland Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
SB 408 - SUPPORT

February 8, 2021

Cathy Gillen

cathy@thegillengroup.com; (443) 463-4449

Member, Maryland Coalition For Highway Safety

Dear Chairman William C. Smith, Jr. and members of the Maryland Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee:

My name is Cathy Gillen and I am a life long resident of the state of Maryland who has dedicated my nearly 30 year career to highway safety here in Maryland and nationally having worked for the Maryland Department of Transportation's State Highway Administration, the U.S. Department of Transportation's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), the Governors Highway Safety Association and Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety. As the owner of my own highway safety consulting firm I have also served as the Managing Director of the Roadway Safety Foundation and the Leader of the Maryland Safe Teen Driving Coalition. I am also a Board Member of the Road Gang and the Washington Regional Alcohol Program (WRAP) and I have represented the interests of such safety organizations as AAA, the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety and the National Safety Council, among many others.

Thank you for allowing me to present my testimony in support of SB 408 "Vehicle Laws - Reckless Driving, Speed Contests, Registration Plates, and Noise Abatement - Penalties." Passage of SB 408 in conjunction with HB 178 is a sensible and prudent way to strengthen Maryland's traffic laws to deter dangerous actions related to speeding and reckless driving that result in needless and preventable traffic crashes, injuries and even fatalities.

It's no secret that the U.S. has a speeding problem. And it's no different here in Maryland. Although speeding – driving at high rates of speed or too fast for conditions - has long been recognized as a critical factor contributing to fatal crashes, effective measures to reduce the problem have been elusive. One of the biggest challenges in addressing the dangers of speeding is that this behavior is widely accepted – we have a culture of speeding – and that is not acceptable and must be changed if we are to stop the carnage.

Over the past five years (2015-2019), speeding has claimed the lives of approximately one-third of all people killed in motor vehicle crashes. And while speeding is risky for all drivers, it is particularly problematic for teens 16 to 19 years of age. A closer look at the speeding data reveals a troubling and persistent trend—the proportion of fatal crashes that involved speeding was higher for teenage drivers than for other age groups (43% versus 30%). And here in Maryland – it is even higher - 50 percent.

From 2015-2019 130 teens were killed in car crashes in Maryland. That is 130 sons and daughters that did not make it home. HALF of those 130 teens aged 16 to 19 killed - or 65 deaths - were speed related. As someone who has spent years working to prevent teen car crashes in Maryland, these numbers are particularly troubling.

Mr. Chairman, what Maryland needs is far stronger deterrence, and I commend you and your colleagues on the Judicial Proceedings Committee for considering how the provisions of SB 408 will significantly deter dangerous speeding:

- Required mandatory court appearances
- Increased penalties for obscuring license tags
- Increased penalties for racing/speeding contests
- Increased penalties for illegal exhaust system modification

Please note that enactment of this bill would not increase costs to Maryland taxpayers.

This legislation couldn't be more timely since during the pandemic, the problem of speeding has only worsened as the roads are less crowded and our roadways have turned into deadly speedways. Last month the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) reported that 11,260 people were killed on U.S. roadways in the third quarter of 2020, a 13.1% increase compared to the same period in 2019, even though fewer people are driving.

Furthermore, at a time when the auto industry has made tremendous gains making vehicles more crashworthy, a new study from AAA and the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) shows how the impulse to speed and the trend of rising speeds, are canceling out those safety advances, with deadly consequences. Even small increases in speed can cause major, traumatic injuries and turn survivable crashes into lethal ones.

Simply put, higher speeds cancel out the benefits of vehicle safety improvements like airbags and improved structural designs. The faster a driver is going before a crash, the less likely it is that they'll be able to get down to a survivable speed even if they have a chance to brake before impact.

The deadly consequences of higher speeds reaffirms the need to comprehensively address the issue of speeding on Maryland roadways and SB 408 is a strong step in the right direction.

Thank you,
Cathy Gillen

Support of SB 408.pdf

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Monday, February 08, 2021

The Maryland House of Delegates Environment and Transportation Committee

Subject: Greater Olney Civic Association Support of SB 408

Due to significant and growing Greater Olney community residents' concerns with excessive speeding and other forms of reckless driving on local and state roads to include MD state Rt 200, Inter-County Connector.

The GOCA unanimously supported SB 408 and allocated \$500 to support lobbying efforts to pass this bill.

This is a serious problem across Maryland and we urge the committee to pass bill SB 408

Sincerely,

Matt Quinn
President, Greater Olney Civic Association

Cc:

MD Coalition Highway Safety - Support SB 408 Testi

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Position: FAV



MARYLAND COALITION FOR HIGHWAY SAFETY

Advance Testimony to Maryland Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

SB 408 - SUPPORT

February 8, 2021

John J. Seng, Director

Maryland Coalition For Highway Safety

JohnJSeng@gmail.com (202) 468-7682

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/marylandcoalitionhighwaysafety>

Re: Please SUPPORT SB 408 “Vehicle Laws – Reckless Driving, Speed Contests, Registration Plates, and Noise Abatement – Penalties” Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee, Hearing Date: 10 February 2021

Dear Chairman William C. Smith, Jr. and Members of the Maryland Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee:

My name is John Seng, volunteer director and founder of the *Maryland Coalition For Highway Safety*. Our 125-member organization supports all provisions in SB 408, sponsored by Senators Ben Kramer and Craig Zucker, and crossfiled with HB 178.

The Maryland Coalition For Highway Safety's founding organizations include the American Automobile Association (AAA) Mid-Atlantic, the Greater Olney Civic Association in Montgomery County, The Tantallon Citizens Association in Prince George's County and a group of Maryland home owner associations.

The Problem



During his victory in the 1963 Indianapolis 500, US driver Parnelli Jones exceeded the 150mph-a-lap mark for the first time with his single lap record 151.5 mph.

Today, fewer than 60 years later, whether you drive or live along the MD 200 Intercounty Connector, I'm not joking when I write that we're [experiencing too-frequent 150+mph speeds and accompanying ear-splitting noise](#) morning, noon and evening, especially on weekends and clear days.

Close your eyes...is it the *Indy 500* or the *ICC 200*?

And across Maryland, what's far worse is that 568 people died on our roads in 2020, despite fewer miles driven due to the coronavirus. And fatalities increased in Montgomery County as well.

I'm not going to cite more statistics. Suffice to say that national, State and local highway safety evidence completely supports this legislation.

Instead, I'd like to pose a few questions to the Committee:

1. Why must Marylanders need to risk dying just to commute, take our kids to school and cross our streets?
2. What are the reasons people speed? It's a mixed bag and none is a good reason: running late, a sense of lack of enforcement and meaningful punishment, little other road traffic, annoyance with slower drivers, for the sport of it, challenges, road rage, and illegal racing contests...the list continues.
3. What are at least two things that the 568 people who died in Maryland share? First, they're all dead. Second, they themselves cannot speak to the reasons that SB 408 is a major step in the right direction. And their families and friends may be largely muted by dealing with grief, contending with COVID and limited in their lobbying skills. Who will act in their memories and on behalf of safeguarding the living?

But doing everything you can to push that 568 number down, down to zero, is upon what each member of your committee, Mr. Smith, can insist.

The Merits of SB 408

This legislation does not address garden variety, "aw shucks," driving 8 mph or so over the speed limit. We're confronting how people interpret the word "limit" today. While risky in and of itself, single-digit speed excess is a matter for another day.

Also, this legislation by itself promises no total cure. But it's a strong start in the right direction.



Approximately 550 people, equal to 2020 Maryland roads death toll.

Instead, this bill effectively addresses where the fires burn hottest, the worst of the worst intermingled mix of calculated, willful illegal abuse of our roads and laws and disregard for innocent lives.

Here's the message that SB 408 will send to the public: "If you think we look the other way in Maryland when you:

1. Deliberately and already illegally configure your vehicle to conceal your license tag; or
2. Appropriate a Maryland public road as your own racetrack or speedway; or
3. Persist in driving recklessly, or while under the influence of alcohol or other drugs; or
4. Speed highly excessively and risk others' lives as well as your own; or
5. Deliberately and illegally install an exhaust system exceeding allowable noise levels that disturb the public as much as a mile away;

...that come this October 2021, thanks to this new legislation, you should understand that Maryland's not quite the same inviting, lenient landscape for dangerous, illegal motoring."

Tell It To The Judge

What's more, given limited law enforcement resources – time, tools, budget and other priorities – we underscore the ingenious deterrent of the mandated court appearance provision. Fewer sanctions can provide more disincentive to speeding and reckless driving than a court appearance, except incarceration. Please don't weaken or remove this provision. If the Maryland courts are overcrowded, decision-makers should consider appropriate solutions to address that need. The answer is not to soften the sanctions and deterrents for dangerous driving.

Making A Strong Start To Address Roadway Abuse

We in our Coalition believe in a multi-faceted approach that centers on deterrence, installing a healthy mix of “stop-and-make-you-think-twice” impediments to aggressive and speeding motorists:

1. More innovative ways to apprehend egregious violators, eg, via drones and cameras
2. More collaboration between DOT and State Police and County municipal law enforcement
3. Better warning road signs that are backed up by enforcement with real teeth
4. Studying ways to encourage the courts to do their part to ensure the effectiveness of traffic safety enforcement
5. And, finally, what's right in front of you now, the opportunity in this session, with your vote, to say to your constituents, pro and con, and especially the families and friends of victims, that you stood up for safety. That you made safety #1. #1 over sport and hobby, #1 over convenience, #1 over personal vanity, #1 over disregard for the law.

This legislation's additional attraction, if necessary to point out, is that it won't cost taxpayers any more.

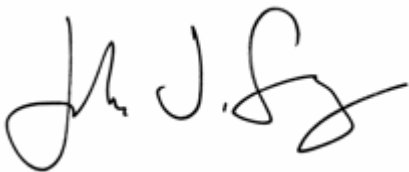
Summary

Mr. Smith and Judicial Proceedings Committee members, the *Maryland Coalition For Highway Safety* views excessive speed, noise, dangerous driving and hiding license tags as a linked and growing malignancy on Maryland roads.

Please recommend this bill to raise the price of illegal, dangerous Maryland vehicle operation, and help lower the body count. Putting more teeth into current laws offers a major step in the right direction. The passage of SB 408 in conjunction with HB 178 presents real potential to save lives in Maryland.

We thank you and the Committee for your review of our concerns. We urge you to submit a favorable report on SB 408.

Sincerely,



John J. Seng
Director

2021 sb408 reckless driving, speed contests, reg

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Position: UNF



ABATE OF MARYLAND, INC.

Dedicated to the Freedom of the Road and Responsible Motorcycle Legislation

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr. Chairman and Members of the
Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Executive Director, Kenneth V. Sawyer, Abate of Maryland, Inc.

DATE: February 7, 2021

RE: **SB408 – Vehicle Laws – Reckless Driving, Speed Contests,
Registration Plates, and Noise Abatement – Penalties**

POSITION: **UNFAVORABLE**

Abate of Maryland, Inc. is for keeping our public roads safer and, as the voice of motorcyclists throughout the state of Maryland, however we are not in favor of SB408.

We support strong penalties for participants in a race or speed contest resulting in serious bodily injury and are in favor that this offense should mandate a must appear court appearance. Though we do not object to the sentiment regarding registration plates, we believe that is an equipment issue and should not be included in this bill.

However, we do not support the proposed amendment to 22-609(c) of charging a \$200 fine to a person convicted of a violation of exhaust modification. We do not believe exhaust modifications are a safety issue and enforcement of modified exhaust systems could lead to the possibility of police profiling of certain vehicle types and motorists.

The video shown during today's testimony of motorcyclists on MD 200 is not an exhaust problem, it is a speed problem. If those motorcycles were traveling at a posted speed limit the noise levels would be acceptable.

Further, we do not support the HB178 amendment that proposes to follow the California levels of noise limitations of 95db. The majority of motorcycles travel at highway speeds close to the proposed 95DB threshold so a majority of current Maryland motorcycles would be in violation of the law. Would this be the right answer? No, enforcement of the speed laws is the correct answer. It will provide safer Maryland roads.

We respectfully request an unfavorable report of SB408, or that the bill be amended to strike the registration plates and noise abatement suggested provisions.

Kenneth V. Sawyer, Executive Director
Abate of Maryland, Inc.

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Position: UNF



ABATE OF MARYLAND, INC.

Dedicated to the Freedom of the Road and Responsible Motorcycle Legislation

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr. Chairman and Members of the
Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Chairman of the Board, Robert Spanburgh Jr., Abate of Maryland, Inc.

DATE: February 7, 2021

RE: **SB408 – Vehicle Laws – Reckless Driving, Speed Contests,
Registration Plates, and Noise Abatement – Penalties**

POSITION: **UNFAVORABLE**

As Chairman of the Board of ABATE of Maryland and on behalf of all motorcyclists in our Great State we would like to express our opposition to Senate Bill 408.

We are strong advocates for responsible driving and vehicle safety. We advocate for full adherence to licensing and all traffic safety laws. We have repeatedly advocated for mandatory court appearances for any motor vehicle accidents resulting in serious bodily injury or death.

As an organization, we feel the broad-reaching aspects of SB 408 do not adequately address these issues. We fear that sub-section 22-609 may be used to profile certain types of vehicles and vehicle operators. We also believe it puts an unnecessary onus on our law enforcement officers.

We respectfully request an unfavorable report and vote on SB 408.