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Judicial Proceedings Committee



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The Senate of Maryland ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

TESTIMONY OF SENATOR SHELLY HETTELMAN SB 75 – Driver's Licenses - Older Licensees - In-Person Renewal

I'm introducing this bill in response to a tragedy that befell my constituents, the Friedman family, who lost a family member in 2019 to the poor driving of an elderly motorist. You will hear more about what happened shortly.

Senate Bill 75 would implement a requirement that drivers age 85 and above should renew their driver's license in person for each renewal. MVA's most recent statistics on crashes involving drivers age 65 and older shows that between 2015 and 2019, the total number of crashes went up by 24%, from 12,736 to 15,795. While the number of fatal crashes remained about the same, the number of injuries went up by 19%, from 4,936 to 5,886.

Several states have implemented measures to try to ensure that older drivers have the ability to drive safely. For example, a dozen states require more frequent license renewal for older drivers.

In Maryland, older drivers aren't required to renew their license more frequently. Just like everyone, older drivers renew their licenses every eight years and have the option of renewing by mail every other renewal. With regard to vision testing, everyone over 40 has to pass a vision test or provide proof when renewing via mail.

One measure that some states have implemented to ensure the ability to drive has not diminished with age is a requirement that older drivers renew in person for each renewal, removing the mail-in option. There are 13 states that have this requirement, including Virginia, California, Texas, Georgia and Illinois.

Research has indicated that this in-person requirement is effective. The Journal of the American Medical Association found in a 2004 study that of these different measures – in-person renewal requirements, more frequent renewals, vision tests, road tests – the in-person renewal requirement actually has an impact in reducing elderly driver fatalities. *It reduces fatalities by 17%.* [1]

The study didn't identify the reasons by which in-person license renewal is related to a reduced fatality rate among elderly drivers. But the authors had a couple of theories, one of which is that "potentially unsafe older drivers may be less likely to re-apply for a license when facing in-person renewal. That is, potentially unsafe older adults may recognize the low likelihood of re-licensure and forego the license renewal process altogether." [2]

This bill was introduced in the House last year and passed 130-0. Unfortunately, it couldn't be considered by this committee because we adjourned early. Respectfully, I ask for your favorable consideration of Senate Bill 75. Thank you.

[1] "Elderly Licensure Laws and Motor Vehicle Fatalities," JAMA, June 16, 2004 – Vol. 191, No. 23, 2840-2846.
[2] JAMA Article at 2844.