



MARYLAND COALITION FOR HIGHWAY SAFETY

Testimony to Maryland Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

SB 0337 - SUPPORT

CROSSFILED WITH HB 0494/HB 0178 - SUPPORT

January 27, 2021

John J. Seng, Director
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Re: Please SUPPORT SB 0337 “Vehicle Laws - Reckless Driving - Excessive Speeding” Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee, Hearing Date: 27 January 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 0337, sponsored by Senator Ben Kramer, and crossfiled with HB 0178/HB 0494.

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

The Problem

We are, quite frankly, fed up with excessive, dangerous speeding on Maryland highways and other roads. Many people continue to die on Maryland roads, and the fatality statistics are heading in the wrong direction. We are bombarded by excruciatingly loud vehicles of all kinds throughout the day and night that we associate with excessive speed and reckless driving.

- **“Maryland has averaged more than 500 traffic fatalities annually over the past five years, and despite reduced traffic volumes during the past six months due to the COVID-19 emergency, fatalities on our roadways have increased compared to 2019.”** (source: Chrissy Nizer, Administrator, MD MVA)
- **Maryland suffered 568 road deaths in 2020, compared to 535 in 2019, over fewer miles driven.** 2020 fatalities increased 6%, crashes increased 9% compared to 2019. (Maryland Highway Safety Office)

- Montgomery County Fatalities Increased 34% in 2020 Over Previous 4-Year Average.

PRELIMINARY 2020 CRASH TOTALS

ALL CRASHES	2019	2016 – 2019 Avg.	2020 Prelim.	% Change
Cyclists	120	133	144	+8%
Drivers / Passengers	11,042	11,315	7,524	-34%
Pedestrians	500	485	357	-26%
TOTAL	11,662	11,933	8,025	-33%

FATAL CRASHES	2019	2016 – 2019 Avg.	2020 Prelim.	% Change
Cyclists	1	1	1	N/A
Drivers / Passengers	18	16	22	+38%
Pedestrians	13	12	16	+33%
TOTAL	32	29	39	+34%

NOTES:

- Red Text = The number is preliminary and subject to change. 2020 cases are still being closed out.
- Includes reports from MCPD, RCPD, GCPD, M-NCPPC Police, and TPPD.
- % change = change from 2020 compared to the 2016-2019 average.

With the pandemic reducing the number of vehicles on the road, the overall number of crashes in 2020 dropped by a third compared to the prior 4-year average. Collisions between motor vehicles and people on bikes saw a slight increase.

 For those still on the road and involved in a crash, there was a notable increase in speeding, impaired, and unbuckled drivers. The increase in risky behavior was observed nationwide. As a result, fatalities were up 34% in Montgomery County compared to the prior 4-year average and projected to increase nationwide in 2020.

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- Road Fatalities Hit A 10-Year High Total Montgomery County.

FATAL CRASHES BY YEAR

Source: MCPD Collision Reconstruction Unit
 *2020 data are preliminary and subject to change

In 2020, there were **39 fatal crashes with 41 fatalities**. This the highest total since 41 fatal crashes in 2010.

 Vehicle occupant (drivers, passengers, and motorcyclists) fatalities reached a low in 2018 with 13 fatal crashes, but in 2020 returned closer to the average of 2010-2015.

 Pedestrian fatalities have been on the rise since 2016. Nationwide, pedestrian fatalities increased by 51% from 2009 to 2019.

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Current Maryland transportation laws are too weak, and fail to deter speeding, reckless driving and other illegal behaviors. That's what *The Maryland Coalition For Highway Safety* has learned in working with elected officials and Maryland highway safety experts. Extreme sporting seems on a dangerous rise on many major and local roads through our communities and near our homes. Too often, speeds exceed 100mph with jet aircraft decibel noise. And across the board, average speeds by drivers creep up, creating safety hazards that risk lives or serious injuries to innocent parties. Often, alcohol and other abused substances further cloud vehicle operator judgment.

Taking Positive Steps

The Coalition has adopted a multi-faceted approach to propose methods to deter excessive, dangerous speed and noise. There is no one size fits all solution. But we must start with much stronger deterrents to violating Maryland road laws.

Make Speeders Tell It To The Judge

In particular, we must emphasize that the mandatory court appearance provision in both the Senate and House bills adds a significant, critical deterrence for individuals who could otherwise still easily, instantly pay even higher penalties, but continue to speed in total disregard for public safety and wellbeing. We don't deny that Maryland courts are currently overwhelmed, but believe that the wheels of justice turning at any speed is worth the benefit. Decision-makers should seek other remedies to alleviate congestion in the legal system. In the meantime, let the specter of a court appearance hang over the heads of drivers who simply pay their fines but selfishly continue their lack of respect for road safety and your constituents.

Putting more teeth into current laws offers a major step in the right direction. The passage of SB 0337 in conjunction with HB 0178 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 0337.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John J. Seng". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "John" being the most prominent.

John J. Seng
Director