

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

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Cathy Gillen

[cathy@thegillengroup.com](mailto: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