



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.

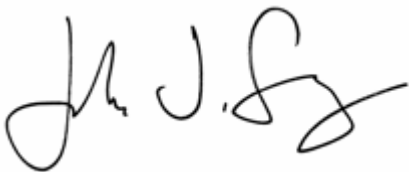
Summary

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