

February 10, 2022

Delegate Kumar Barve, Chair
Committee on Transportation and Environment
Maryland Housing of Delegates

Position: Support with amendments for HB 0404 - Vehicle Laws - Speed Limits – Establishment

Amendments:

Page 2, Line 18, 19 & 20, strike:

~~“(H) A local authority may not implement a new speed monitoring system to enforce speed limits on any portion of a highway for which the speed limit has been decreased under this paragraph.”~~

Regarding Amendment No. 2 by Delegate Lehman: strike “decreased” insert “TO LESS THAN 25 MILES PER HOUR,” we support this amendment as far as it goes, but recommend changing to: TO LESS THAN 15 MILES PER HOUR.

Please accept these comments on behalf of the Coalition for Smarter Growth, the leading non-profit organization in the D.C. region, including suburban Maryland, advocating for walkable, bikeable, inclusive, transit-oriented communities as the most sustainable and equitable way for the DC region to grow and provide opportunities for all.

We would like to express our support for House Bill 0404, with amendments. We agree with the bill’s intention to give local authorities the option to evaluate and lower speed limits on highways. Highways have a diversity of users, including people walking, biking, pushing strollers, using a wheelchair, and driving cars and trucks. The design speed and the posted speed limit are often too high, and do not sufficiently accommodate the safety and access needs of different users. Driving vehicles at high speeds is a grave danger to people. Collisions often result in severe injury and death. In fact, recent years have been the deadliest for people walking in decades. According to [Dangerous by Design](#), “the four most recent years on record (2016-2019) are the most deadly years for pedestrian deaths since 1990.”

This bill enables local authorities to change the speed limit to a more appropriate vehicle speed to better balance the needs of different users of a highway in a community. Posted speed limits, along with clear signage, enforcement and other deterrence measures, and most importantly, redesigning a roadway for lower speeds, are all tools to ensure safe use of Maryland’s public rights of way.

Amendments

We are concerned about the bill's original blanket prohibition on the use of a new speed monitoring system to enforce a newly posted speed, even when it is validated by an engineering study. While we support Delegate Lehman's proposed Amendment No. 2, as far as it goes, we are still concerned it weakens local authorities' ability to enforce speed limits in order to address safety goals in their communities. In particular, we are concerned about the impact that limitations on enforcement could have on safety in school zones, near parks and playgrounds, libraries and main streets. If a new school zone has a posted speed limit for 15 or 20 MPH, this bill would prohibit the local authority from using a new speed monitoring system to enforce the speed limit. This would be despite the results of a study validating a speed set below 25 MPH. If a school zone is experiencing a pattern of unsafe and high speeds by motorists, the local authority should have the tools it deems appropriate to bring driver behavior into compliance with the posted legal speed limit. Without effective enforcement, speed limits are too often ignored, even in school zones.

We ask that the state not limit local authorities' ability to improve compliance with their speed limits. We need many tools to operate safe highways. Evaluation, engineering, education, and equitable enforcement are all needed to ensure our highways can be used safely by all users. Speed enforcement measures should be located and operated wherever there is an identified need to regulate speed and ensure compliance.

Barring the use of a new speed monitoring system is contrary with the intent of this bill to ensure safer operations of highways. We ask the committee to give a favorable report to this bill with the amendment we have proposed.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,



Cheryl Cort
Policy Director