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**Committee: Environment and Transportation**

**Testimony on: HB 53 – “Vehicle Laws – Dedicated Bus Lanes – Prohibition and Monitoring Systems”**

**Position: Favorable**

**Hearing Date: February 10, 2022**

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club supports HB 53 that would impose a prohibition on the vehicles which may be driven in a dedicated bus lane unless authorized by the local jurisdiction. Vehicles that could be driven in a dedicated bus lane are transit vehicles owned, operated, or contracted for by the Maryland Transit Administration or a local department of transportation, school buses, bicycles, emergency vehicles, and vehicles that would be making a right turn at the next intersection.

The bill would authorize Baltimore City to use a bus lane monitoring system that would record images of vehicles traveling in a bus lane in order to enforce the prohibition on unauthorized vehicles using the dedicated lanes. The bill specifies the training that monitoring system operators would need to complete, the information that should be included with the citation that would be sent to drivers caught violating the prohibition, and that violators would be subject to a civil penalty that may not exceed \$100. Failure to pay the fine could result in suspension of the motor vehicle registration.

Bus lane monitoring systems are needed to allow dedicated bus lanes to work as intended. Buses traveling in dedicated lanes carry upward of four times more travelers per hour than a general traffic lane. Dedicated lanes allow buses to double or triple bus speeds by avoiding traffic congestion caused largely by single-occupancy vehicles. The biggest challenge to having dedicated bus lanes work as intended is finding effective enforcement mechanisms to keep unauthorized users out of those lanes.

Faster travel in dedicated bus lanes encourages greater use of transit, which is much better for our environment and public health. Transportation is the largest source of climate-disrupting greenhouse gases in Maryland and our nation today, so reducing the number of single-occupancy gas and diesel-fueled vehicles on the roads, and increasing the use of mass transit, is critical. Tailpipe emissions from vehicles also are hazardous to human health, and are linked to cancers, heart disease, asthma, emphysema, and other respiratory diseases.

In summary, this proposal would enable dedicated bus lanes in our state to work as intended, which would allow buses to be faster and attract more ridership, and bicyclists and emergency vehicles to get where they need to go as quickly as possible. This bill would bring about positive change, and we urge a favorable report on it.

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Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America’s oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 70,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has over 800,000 members and nearly four million supporters.