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Committee: Judicial Proceedings

Testimony on: SB25 - "Reckless and Negligent Driving – Death of Another – Must-Appear Violation (Sherry's and Christopher's Law)"

Position: Favorable with Amendment

Hearing Date: January 18, 2022

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club supports SB 25, which would provide that a person charged with reckless or negligent driving that contributes to an accident resulting in the death of another person must appear in court and cannot prepay the fine.

Transportation is now the largest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions in our state. Tailpipe emissions from cars and trucks are also a major source of health-damaging air pollution. This means there is growing need to get individuals out of their cars, taking transit, riding bikes, and walking more. However, it is quite difficult to make this happen near roads where people sometimes drive in a reckless or negligent manner.

We live in a car-centric culture where transportation planning, road infrastructure and vehicle laws are largely focused on enabling vehicles to get to their destination as swiftly as possible. Unfortunately, this has resulted in some drivers feeling they have priority on the road, and there are high rates of injury and death for bicyclists and pedestrians as well as vehicle drivers and passengers. According to the Maryland Department of Transportation Motor Vehicle Administration's Highway Safety Office, there were 542 traffic fatalities in our state last year. Speeding accounts for more than 9,800 crashes and 4,500 injuries each year in Maryland.

In updating the section of the law where a death has been caused, we encourage this committee to consider conforming the maximum fine provided in the existing law (\$1,000) with the allowable fine in section 21-901.3 of the Transportation Article of the Maryland Code (\$2,000).

This bill could help bring about needed change. The tougher approach specified in the bill, which would be further strengthened by the amendment we suggest, would force individuals to take responsibility in court for their reckless or negligent driving, where they also may have to face people who lost a loved one in an accident caused by their driving. This should help discourage reckless and negligent driving, and make our roads safer for everyone.

We urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on this bill as amended.

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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.