



**Testimony to the House Environment and Transportation Committee
SB 105 – Vehicle Laws – Failure to Pay Video Toll – Reform of Penalties –
Position: Favorable**

Jan. 18, 2022

The Honorable Will Smith
Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East, Miller Senate Building
Annapolis, MD 21401
cc: Members, Judicial Proceedings Committee

Dear Chairman Smith and Committee Members,

I'm a consumer advocate and Executive Director of Consumer Auto, a group that brings together consumer-friendly auto dealers and consumer advocates to work for safety, transparency, and fair treatment for Maryland drivers and car buyers.

Consumer Auto supports **SB 105** because we believe Maryland's existing practice of suspending vehicle registrations over relatively small toll debts is unduly punitive – especially for lower-income drivers who can quickly fall into debt traps as a result of Maryland's rather high toll violation fines and aggressive collection practices. Discontinuing the practice of suspending registrations as a result of those fines would relieve some of that pressure – and prevent some of those who struggle to pay these fines from facing still greater legal difficulties as they continue to drive (sometimes on suspended tags) to get to work and meet their other needs.

In the past these suspensions have impacted a surprisingly large number of Marylanders. Between 2015 and 2018, the MdTA put a hold on the renewal of vehicle registrations of more than 207,000 Marylanders and about 22,000 Marylanders had their tags suspended because of toll violations.

The many problems surrounding the state's move to all-cashless tolling and the huge backlog of 23 million toll fees that accrued during the pandemic – and that the MDTA will be doling out to drivers for many more months – seem certain to make this troubling situation even worse. And after a state audit revealed that tens of thousands of Marylanders have been overcharged at Maryland's five cash-less toll facilities, we have to wonder about the accuracy of some of the charges that will arrive on driver's doorsteps.

Still, those late-arriving toll charges will surely result in many more fines for delinquent payments. And since it is often lower-income Marylanders who are subject to video tolling because they lack an EZ Pass transponder – or whose EZ Pass accounts may fall into arrears because they can't automatically pay by credit card – those fines will adversely affect many Marylanders who are already struggling financially.

For too many Marylanders, these fines can quickly become a kind of financial quicksand. They create a debt trap and a threat to the vehicle registrations they need to maintain to be able to get to



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work, pursue their education, or access the services and supports they and their families need.

Only eight states now suspend or revoke vehicle registrations for outstanding toll violations. Maryland can provide relief to hard-pressed residents by joining the 42 states that DO NOT suspend or revoke registrations for toll fines.

I urge you to give a **FAVORABLE report to SB 105.**

Sincerely,

Franz Schneiderman
Consumer Auto