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Government Operations and
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Public Health and Minority
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HB 7

Reckless and Negligent Driving - Death of Another - Must-Appear Violation

Members of the of the House Judiciary Committee, I come before you today to present House Bill 7 and ask for you to give it a favorable report.

This bill may only add two sentences to Maryland law, but those two sentences would carry a lot of weight for families looking for closure following a tragic death. Under current law, an individual who kills a person due to reckless or negligent driving may pre-pay the fine and avoid a court appearance altogether.

Although additional strain on the judicial system should be considered for any mandate such as the one proposed in this bill, it is a non-factor in this instance. In a given year, the amount of reckless and negligent driving charges that are associated with a death is only in the double digits. This is an easy way to hold offenders accountable for the life that they ended without damaging our court system. HB 7 will require that offenders appear in court for crimes of a life-or-death nature, which is the least we can do for families facing the tremendous sense of loss felt from the death of a loved one.

In reckless and negligent driving cases, offenders are mandated to show up under circumstances that are much less serious. Throwing objects at a vehicle and failure to report an accident to police both require the offender to appear in court. Why would we require less for a driver that killed someone else due to their actions?

Last year, a bill was passed to consider vulnerable people like a bicyclist or pedestrian. This year, let's include motorcycle riders too. Their families may or may not want to see the person responsible for the death of their loved one. HB 7 will make sure the person who took a life appears in court.

Certainly, the value of life in our state should be treated under different circumstances than the process used to pay a parking ticket. The tragedy of a lost life is worth more than a check in the mail and by giving this bill a favorable report, you are giving families a chance to receive closure or find some healing.

Vote in FAVOR of HB 7