
March 2, 2023

The Honorable Kumar P. Barve
Chair, House Environment and Transportation Committee
Room 251, House Office Building
Annapolis MD 21401

RE: Letter of Information – House Bill 966 – Motor Vehicles - Modified Exhaust Systems and Noise Abatement Devices - Testing and Penalties

Dear Chair Barve and Committee Members:

The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) takes no position on House Bill 966 but offers the following information for the Committee’s consideration.

House Bill 966 requires the Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA) to add an “exhaust sound test” as a component of the Vehicle Emissions Inspection Program (VEIP) and adopt regulations and testing methods for ensuring compliance with sound level limits for each type of motor vehicle. This would be in addition to the testing of a vehicle’s emissions system currently conducted in select counties in Maryland to meet requirements established by the federal Clean Air Act (CAA).

As House Bill 966 is currently drafted, testing for exhaust systems would expand VEIP testing to 10 counties and for vehicles currently exempted. It is estimated that this expansion has a cost of over \$50 million in one-time set-up expenses for existing VEIP stations and opening of new testing facilities. Further, an estimated \$19 million in annual operating costs would be needed to meet increased operational demand. Customers currently pay \$14 for VEIP testing, which is designed to meet the cost of administering the VEIP and is capped in statute.

It is not determined if the method for testing noise proposed in House Bill 966 is as effective in addressing the intent of reducing noise on roadways. If law enforcement issues a safety equipment repair order for motorists driving at highway speeds, a test in an enclosed facility using strictly engine revolutions per minutes (RPMs) may not accurately capture contributing factors, such as tire tread and road surface in conjunction with engine decibels. It is also not clear how exhaust noise tests can be verified at self-service kiosks.

Since 2015, law enforcement officials have averaged approximately 800 citations annually for those violating existing law regarding the modification of exhaust systems or other noise abatement devices, with the highest being just over 1,000 citations issued in calendar year 2021; House Bill 966 would require testing of over 5.1 million vehicles. The MVA recognizes the intent of House Bill 966, and it is imperative to focus on enforcement of current law.

The Honorable Kumar P. Barve
Page Two

The Maryland Department of Transportation respectfully requests the Committee consider this information when deliberating House Bill 966.

Respectfully submitted,

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