

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE MARYLAND HOUSE ENVIRONMENT AND
TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE
THURSDAY, MARCH 9, 2023 AT 1 PM
HOUSE BILL 1029 – PUBLIC SAFETY – LIGHTS ON FOR MARYLAND PROGRAM –
ESTABLISHMENT**

Presented by Claudia Barber, member of the Caucus of African American Leaders

Good evening Chair Kumar Barve and Vice Chair Dana Stein.

The Caucus of African American Leaders endorses establishing the Lights On for Maryland Program to authorize law enforcement agencies to provide vouchers to drivers detained at traffic stops. We believe the law could and should expand to law enforcement using the voucher program in lieu of issuing a citizen a citation for a broken tail light or similar headlight or tail light failure, especially when many rely on transportation to travel to and keep their jobs. They cannot afford losing a day's pay fighting a traffic citation of this minor nature.

Over the years, the Caucus has met with many state and local officials and provided statistical data on traffic stops in several jurisdictions. We have seen firsthand, disparity in treatment of citizens stopped by law enforcement at traffic stops for simple minor offenses such as a broken tail lights.

In 2021, Maryland State Senator Charles Sydnor, provided the following link to his constituents of a Baltimore County Traffic Stop Data Dashboard:

<https://www.baltimorecountymd.gov/county-news/2021/06/04/baltimore-county-releases-traffic-stop-data-dashboard>

This traffic stop data illustrates how Blacks, who make up a smaller percentage of the population than whites in Baltimore County, were stopped **56 percent** of the time for minor traffic offenses. This racial profiling is rooted in racism and

demonstrates that police are policing neighborhoods differently. It is not enough to collect these statistics and then do nothing!

There are even retired police officers who are members of the Caucus, who have been stopped by law enforcement for frivolous reasons and can relate to the harassment and abuse that citizens of color experience every day at the hands of police.

Many Black men feel very uncomfortable when stopped by police because they see it as an act of intimidation as they are often required to answer a multitude of questions that have nothing to do with the traffic stop, such as where are you going, and do you have any drugs in the car? Some law enforcement officers go as far as to make false accusations that they smell drugs or alcohol when there is neither.

Many times, frivolous traffic stops lead to the death of individuals who, if they were white, would undoubtedly still be alive. We have proof of this in the cases of Leroy Perry in Glen Burnie, Maryland, Sandra Bland in Texas, Terrence Crutcher in Oklahoma, Philando Castille in Minneapolis, and Walter Scott in Charleston, South Carolina.

We often ask why aren't upscale neighborhoods seeing the same number of traffic stops of citizens as other neighborhoods. Surely broken tail lights occur on all operating vehicles, driven by the rich and the poor.

It concerns us greatly that the length of traffic stops for various citizens varies according to race. We see this legislation as a step in the right direction. We ask that this committee issue a favorable report on this legislation.

Thank you, House Environment and Transportation Committee members, and Mr. Chairman for your time.