



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Testimony in Support of HB 1130**  
**Vehicle Laws – Noise Abatement Monitoring Systems – Authorization, Use, and Penalties**

Noise from vehicles with illegally modified exhaust systems or muffler problems is a growing problem in communities across the state. Overly loud vehicles are a quality-of-life concern for community members, especially those adjacent to multi-lane highways where racing engines can be heard blocks away.

HB 1130 would enable counties and municipalities to use noise abatement monitoring systems to automatically detect vehicles in violation of motor vehicle noise requirements. By using noise cameras, counties and municipalities can address excessive noise concerns without increasing traffic stops by law enforcement.

**Noise Pollution: An Increasing Quality of Life Concern**

Maryland and federal regulations both establish a maximum sound limit of 80 decibels for vehicles sold and operating on our state's roads.<sup>1,2</sup> Under current law, it's illegal to modify a vehicle's exhaust system or to operate a vehicle that exceeds this threshold. These laws exist because excessive noise negatively affects the health of humans and animals, including increased risk of hearing damage, elevated blood pressure, higher stress levels, stroke, and dementia, in addition to being a public nuisance.

Although state law currently allows for police to ticket excessively loud vehicles, enforcement is difficult for police, as most officers aren't equipped with decibel meters and many police departments don't want to increase traffic stops.

**New Technology for Automatic Enforcement**

New technology is emerging to automatically detect excessively loud vehicles and to send the vehicle owner a citation. Noise cameras work similarly to speed cameras, with technology placed adjacent to a road that can measure the loudness of each vehicle

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<sup>1</sup> COMAR Section 11.14.07.13

<sup>2</sup> 40 CFR § 205.52

that drives past. If a vehicle exceeds 80 decibels, the noise camera is triggered to take a picture of the license plate of the offending vehicle.

The cameras are sophisticated enough to recognize the difference between different types of sound by monitoring the noise pattern. As such, these noise cameras can specifically look for noise caused by illegally modified exhaust pipes and mufflers.

The potential citation is reviewed by a person before it is sent to the vehicle owner to ensure that it is appropriate and complies with the law.

### **Automated Enforcement by Other Jurisdictions**

Several states and cities have taken action to authorize and start using noise cameras. The states of New York and California enacted legislation to authorize pilot programs. New York's pilot is operational and is currently ticketing excessively loud vehicles.

Knoxville, Tennessee started a pilot program in February 2022 and has since decided to continue the use of noise cameras. Albuquerque, New Mexico is moving ahead with sound cameras. Washington, DC and Miami Beach, Florida are currently considering the use of noise cameras. Worldwide, several jurisdictions currently use or will soon be deploying noise cameras, including in Paris, Taipei, the United Kingdom, and Australia.

### **What the Bill Does**

This bill is modeled after Maryland's speed camera program and includes the same legislative safeguards:

- Enables local governments to use sound cameras to catch illegally loud vehicles.
- A local government would need to authorize the use of the sound cameras, after public notice and holding at least one public hearing.
- Before each sound camera could be installed, the local government would need to provide public notice about the proposed location of the camera and install a sign near the camera that indicates that noise abatement monitoring is happening in the area.
- An employee of the local government must review each citation.
- For the first offense, a warning must be issued.
  - For subsequent offenses, a citation is mailed for a civil penalty of up to \$70—the same penalty if a law enforcement officer issues the violation.
  - No points can be assessed.
- A vehicle owner who receives a citation can either pay it or contest it in court.
- Rental car companies are exempted, as they are under the speed camera bill.
- The camera vendor's fee cannot be contingent on a per-ticket basis.