



Howard County Council

Deb Jung
Councilmember

District 4

George Howard Building
3430 Court House Drive
Ellicott City, Maryland 21043-4392

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HB208
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FAVORABLE

Dear Chair Delegate Barve, Vice Chair Delegate Stein, and Members of the Environment & Transportation Committee:

Thank you, Delegate Lehman and the 45 other Delegate sponsors for introducing HB208. This is a much-needed bill for local jurisdictions in Maryland.

While drag racing and exhibition driving has always been a problem, the instances of such activity grew exponentially during the COVID quarantine and became commonplace in many communities. Meet ups were planned via social media, large groups of cars would gather to race down major State roads and local streets, and local police were at a loss about how to stop this activity given the number of vehicles and the ability for the cars to disperse quickly.

As a Councilmember in Howard County, I am aware that most residents would welcome prohibitions and increased penalties for this type of activity. Complaints about loud engines and car racing frequently fill my Council inbox and were one of the most common concerns I heard when I was door knocking during my reelection campaign. My Councilmanic District is bounded by Route 29 and Route 108 and bisected by Route 32. Loud engine noise and car racing is a frequent occurrence on all of these roads. I know this because I hear it from Route 32 in my home almost every night. Not only does this activity take place on our major roads, it also occurs in the parking lots at the Columbia Mall, our Village Centers, including one that was defaced with tire tracks from a pop-up rally, and on local neighborhood streets creating extremely loud disturbances.

Our County has attempted to address the issue but has expressed the need for more tools to be successful. On August 8, 2022, one of our Columbia Village Boards held a town hall to discuss issues involving cars with modified engines racing through neighborhoods, disturbing the peace, and illegal street racing. I attended the meeting as a panelist, as did other elected officials, the Howard County Police Chief Der, and Police Major Justin Baker, who directs field operations.

Chief Der stated that the problem of car rallies started in October 2020 and that in May 2021 police throughout the state started working cooperatively because the situation had escalated to

include large groups of cars performing stunts for media posts. Chief Der noted that the police monitor social media for rally locations to prevent gatherings designed to disturb the peace and endanger public safety. Major Baker stated that the most effective deterrent at present is the equipment repair order, which requires modified exhaust systems to be restored to factory settings.

Former State Delegate Reid Novotny, another panelist that evening, related an incident he witnessed when returning home on Route 32 one evening with his child. He and nearby cars were brought to a stop by drag racers so that they could conduct an impromptu car race on the State highway. Needless to say, he expressed concern about the safety of his child during a routine trip home.

At the end of the town hall, the panel discussed the 2022 General Assembly bill that would have given police the ability to impound on site but was vetoed by Governor Hogan. The police in attendance that night felt that any increased penalties or powers would help improve responses to the calls that they get. We need to find more proactive ways to remove these dangerous drivers from our roads and this bill will go a long way to help in that effort.

I urge all of you to vote in favor of HB208. Thank your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Deb Jung
Councilmember, District 4