

House Bill 0094
FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS
Vehicle Laws - Reduction of Speed Limits by Local Authorities
House of Delegates Environment and Transportation Committee
February 2, 2023

Submitted by Seth Grimes, Montgomery County, Maryland

Chair Barve and members of the Environment and Transportation Committee,

My name is Seth Grimes. I am a Montgomery County resident, a former Takoma Park City Council member, and a community advocate working on issues including pedestrian, bicyclist, and roadway safety.

I support HB94 with amendments that would apply only to Montgomery County.

HB94 would authorize local authorities statewide to decrease the maximum speed limit to not less than 15 miles per hour under certain conditions. §21-803(a)(4) applies only to Montgomery County and Montgomery County Municipalities. I ask you to amend HB94 to specify, in (a)(4)(ii), that the required engineering and traffic investigation may be conducted for a given class of street or highway, on an area- or jurisdiction-wide basis, without having to study each street/highway individually. I also ask you to strike (a)(4)(iii), a provision prohibiting use of new speed-monitoring systems.

It is well understood that lower speed limits mean safer streets for all. According to the Federal Highway Administration, “a driver traveling at 30 miles per hour who hits a pedestrian has a 45 percent chance of killing or seriously injuring them. At 20 miles per hour, that percentage drops to 5 percent. A number of cities across the United States, including New York, Washington, Seattle and Minneapolis, have reduced their local speed limits in recent years in an effort to reduce fatalities and serious injuries, with most having to secure State legislative authorization to do so.”

A 2011 technical report published by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, Impact Speed and a Pedestrian’s Risk of Severe Injury or Death, found that the average risk of severe injury to a pedestrian increased with vehicle speed from 10% at 16 MPH, 25% at 23 MPH, 50% at 31 MPH, and higher at higher speeds.

Authorizing jurisdictions to lower maximum roadway speeds to 15 MPH would be a positive safety step.

§21-803(a)(4)(ii), applying only to Montgomery County and Montgomery County municipalities, states, “A local authority may decrease the maximum speed limit to not less than 15 miles per hour on a highway only after performing an engineering and traffic investigation.” An engineering and traffic investigation is an onerous requirement if applied on a street-by-street basis. A jurisdiction should be allowed to decrease speed limits on all streets of a certain type within a defined area, based on investigation that considers area

conditions without having to study each street/highway individually. Uniformity of speed limits throughout an area or jurisdiction would reduce driver confusion and likely boost speed-limit compliance.

Compare that effective July 1, 2020, the District of Columbia established a default speed limit of 20 mph for all local streets, residential streets that primarily serve neighborhood traffic. I ask that you enable Montgomery County and Montgomery County municipalities to make the same type of jurisdiction- or area-wide change.

Again, I ask you to remove the §21-803(a)(4)(iii) provision prohibiting implementation of new speed monitoring systems, in order to allow for such automated enforcement. Automated enforcement is proven to be an effective mechanism to get drivers to significantly lower their speeds.

I urge HB94 amendments applying only in Montgomery County and then a favorable committee report.

Thank you.

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