



*Troy D. Berry*  
Sheriff

# Office of the Sheriff

Charles County, Maryland  
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February 29, 2024

The Honorable Marc Korman  
Chair, Environment and Transportation Committee

The Honorable Regina T. Boyce  
Vice-Chair, Environment and Transportation Committee

Honorable Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee

RE: HB 972: Off-Highway Vehicles – Clarifications and Revisions

Dear Chairman Brave,

The Charles County Sheriff's Office supports HB 972, title Motor Vehicles – Off-Highway Vehicles – Clarifications and Revisions.

In recent years, Charles County has seen frequent and increasing misuse of off-road vehicles such as dirt bikes and all-terrain vehicles. Our county has seen individuals engaged in reckless driving behavior on public roads – weaving in and out of traffic, “popping wheelies,” obstructing traffic, and generally placing our citizens in fear.

From 2019 through 2023, the Charles County Sheriff's Office handled **4,861** calls related to ATV's and dirt bikes, including **785** in 2023 alone. Despite generally cold weather, the Sheriff's Office had **43** calls in January, 2024. Most of those calls (562 in 2023) related to the operation of off-road vehicles on public highways. As spring returns to the area, we expect to continue to have to respond to this problem.

Apprehending the individuals involved in this behavior poses challenges. Maryland law prohibits unregistered motor vehicles, such as all-terrain vehicles, from being operated on a highway. Despite that law, the Sheriff's Office has seen a growing trend of individuals operating off-road vehicles on our public

roads in reckless and dangerous manners. These individuals often elude or attempt to elude police.

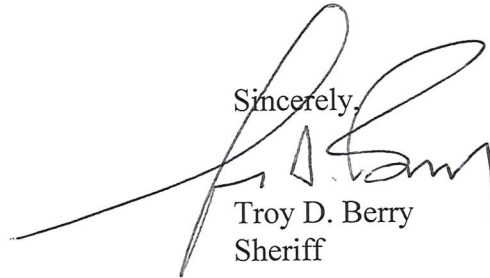
When officers are able to catch the individuals in the act, the vehicle they used may be towed to a private facility. In the absence of regulations allowing for the seizure of these vehicles, the owners are able to quickly recover the vehicle and officers repeatedly encounter the same individuals on the same vehicles engaged in the same behavior.

HB 972 will allow local jurisdictions to create an impoundment process for off-highway vehicles used in violation of Maryland's Vehicle Law. The best and most efficient way to deter this dangerous behavior is to take away, even temporarily, the instrument used for the behavior. Local jurisdictions will have the ability to tailor their impoundment rules in a way that makes sense for that jurisdiction.

HB 972 is an important step, but does not go far enough. The Sheriff's Office frequently receives complaints of individuals driving off-road vehicles on private and public property without permission. Not only does this behavior violate the Criminal Law, it also causes extensive property damage. In 2023 alone, the Sheriff's Office responded to **69** calls of the illegal use of off-road vehicles on private or public property. HB 972 can be an even more important tool if local jurisdictions are permitted to impound off-road vehicles that are used to violate §6-404 and §6-405 of the Criminal Law Article, in addition to violations of the Vehicle Law.

For these reasons, the Charles County Sheriff's Office requests a favorable report on HB 972, and respectfully asks that consideration be given to expanding its scope. Thank you for the attention you are providing to this important legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Troy D. Berry', is written over the typed name and title.

Troy D. Berry  
Sheriff