

February 15, 2024

Environment and Transportation Committee  
Room 251  
House Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: SUPPORT for House Bill 601 Street Racing and Exhibition Driving – Prohibited Acts, Enforcement, and Penalties

Chair Korman, Vice Chair Boyce, and Esteemed Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee:

I write in strong support of House Bill 601, which would alter penalties and points assessments for motor vehicle violations related to participation in a race or speed contest and exhibition driving on any highway or private property that is used by the public for driving.

The 2022 version of this bill passed both the Senate and House and was vetoed by then-Governor Larry Hogan. The 2023 version of this legislation passed the House. This year's version of the bill incorporates previous years' amendments and reflects the extensive conversations that the House and Senate sponsors have had with stakeholders.

Specifically, this bill would establish an eight point penalty for participating in a race or speed contest on a highway and/or engaging in exhibition driving on a highway and a 12 point penalty for participating in a race or speed contest and/or engaging in exhibition driving on a highway that results in serious bodily injury to another person. Additionally, this bill would establish that a person convicted of a violation would be subject to imprisonment not exceeding 60 days or a fine not exceeding \$1,000 or both and that a person convicted of a violation that results in serious bodily injury to another person is subject to imprisonment not exceeding 10 years or a fine not exceeding \$1,000 or both.

There are guardrails built into this legislation. The bill specifies that a court may consider in defense of a charge for exhibition driving that the individual driving the motor vehicle acted in a reasonable manner for safety purposes or that the individual driving the motor vehicle was participating in a properly permitted parade at the time of the alleged violation. Furthermore, the legislation has carve-outs for Worcester County and therefore does not interfere with any of the events or activities in Ocean City.

This is an issue of serious and persistent concern to your constituents. Regrettably, the issues of street racing and exhibition driving are long-standing and continuing to worsen. The majority of people to whom I speak - regardless of age, gender, race, or income - complain about loud engines, speeding, and reckless and aggressive driving and would welcome increased enforcement and penalties for street racing and exhibition driving. I myself live at a busy intersection where loud drag racing disturbs my family every night, and I witness speeding and reckless driving on the roads every day. This is a problem that plagues neighborhoods regardless of how urban, suburban, or rural they are, as evidenced by the fact that this bill is co-sponsored

by legislators from Montgomery, Prince George's, Anne Arundel, Frederick, Howard, Allegany, Washington, Charles, Calvert, Baltimore, and Baltimore City.

Nationally, traffic fatalities are trending down, but in 2023, Maryland saw its [highest fatality rate in nearly 20 years](#), reporting [600 deaths](#) on Maryland roads. The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) [states](#), “Speeding is a significant aggressive driving behavior and is estimated to be a contributing factor in over one-third of all fatal crashes nationwide. The probability of death or serious injury grows with impacts at higher speeds - doubling for every 10 MPH over 50 MPH that a vehicle travels.” By definition, street racing and exhibition driving involve speeding.

Street racing and exhibition driving also involve excessive, abrupt acceleration or deceleration; skidding, squealing, burning, or smoking of tires; swerving or swaying from side to side; the engine producing unreasonably loud, raucous, or disturbing noise; grinding the gears and the backfiring of the engine; the wheels losing contact with the ground; and transporting a passenger on or in an area of a motor vehicle that is not designed or intended for passenger transport such as the hood or roof.

These aggressive and reckless behaviors have no place on our roads. Engaging in such activities must carry strict consequences - and these consequences must actually be enforced. If not, we risk further erosion of the public’s belief that government is invested in its constituents’ welfare and is effective at passing, implementing, and enforcing laws that serve to protect the public interest.

MDOT [states](#), “Every crash is preventable. Every life counts. Maryland is dedicated to saving lives and preventing injuries from motor vehicle crashes.” Last September, Governor Wes Moore announced more than [\\$11.5 million](#) in funding for 85 organizations, agencies, and programs working to improve roadway safety in Maryland by preventing impaired, aggressive, and distracted driving; increasing safety for pedestrians and bicyclists; supporting police training for highway safety and traffic enforcement; funding overtime enforcement of traffic laws; and more. The Executive branch is taking action to address this urgent problem. I implore the legislature to do so as well. Enacting this legislation would be a meaningful step forward in the mission to prevent senseless injury and death.

Driving is a privilege, not a right. Willfully choosing to endanger the health, safety, and wellbeing of others must have consequences. Street racing and exhibition driving are not victimless crimes.

For the foregoing reasons, I urge a favorable report in order to protect the lives of your constituents who are threatened daily by these illegal activities.

Sincerely,

Caroline Davenport  
Montgomery County resident