

ENVIRONMENT & TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE
House Bill 344:
Transportation – Vision Zero Advisory Commission – Establishment

Date: February 8, 2024

Position: Support with Amendment

Thank you to Chair Korman and the Committee Members for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Disability Rights Maryland (“DRM,” formerly known as the Maryland Disability Law Center, MDLC) is Maryland’s designated Protection & Advocacy agency, which is part of a nationwide network of organizations established by Congress to protect and advance the rights of people with disabilities.

HB 344 aims to make our roads safer for everyone who uses them, regardless of their mode of transportation. This is a critical issue: in 2022, 564 people were killed in crashes in Maryland. Of these fatalities, 62% were motorists, 23% were pedestrians, 13% were motorcyclists, and 2% were bicyclists.¹ Nationally, pedestrian fatalities are growing relative to other traffic deaths. From 2010 to 2021, pedestrian fatalities increased by 77 percent.² In Maryland, there were 2.16 pedestrian fatalities per 100,000 people in 2021; this is a fatality rate that is higher than two-thirds of other states. An estimated 92% of pedestrian-involved crashes in Maryland result in injury or death.¹

Pedestrian fatalities are even more likely when the pedestrian is a person with a disability, which is consistently shown in studies. Persons who use wheelchairs experience substantial pedestrian mortality disparities.³ When there is poor pedestrian infrastructure or infrastructure is poorly adapted to people with mobility impairments, people who use wheelchairs often are forced to use the streets, or are otherwise exposed to greater risk. Further, pedestrians who have sensory, developmental, cognitive, or physical impairments all have increased risk of fatalities caused by vehicles.⁴

Rather than continue to accept the status quo that traffic deaths are inevitable, HB 344 challenges traffic engineers, planners, law enforcement, and others to view traffic deaths as preventable and to plan roads that account for failures in human behavior. The goals of HB 344

¹ Maryland Highway Safety Office, available at <https://zerodeathsmd.gov/highway-safety-office/>,

² Governors Highway Safety Association, 2022 data.

³ See John D. Kraemer and Connor S. Benton, *Disparities in road crash mortality among pedestrians using wheelchairs in the USA: results of a capture–recapture analysis*, National Library of Medicine, National Center for Biotechnology Information (2015), available at [https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4654303/#:~:text=This%20study%20found%20that%2C%20from,risk%20\(p%3C0.001\).](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4654303/#:~:text=This%20study%20found%20that%2C%20from,risk%20(p%3C0.001).)

⁴ *Id.*

can be accomplished by a variety of means, depending on local conditions, resources, and needs. Combinations of engineering, enforcement, and education are the potential tools the commission will have in its the toolbox.

This bill establishes a Vision Zero Advisory Commission to advise the Governor and state agencies on traffic safety for pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists. Additionally, the commission will include a representative from the Maryland Department of Disabilities, as well as an individual from an organization who advocates for people with disabilities. These appointments will increase the likelihood that the commission's decisions will consider the higher risks of pedestrian fatalities for people with disabilities, and how we can best address these concerns. Any findings and recommendations from the commission will be published in the Maryland Department of Transportation's Vision Zero report, which is required by current law to be published annually. We believe HB 334 will be a major step in our goal of ending pedestrian and vehicle accidents and deaths.

We note one requested amendment: The bill should include disability in reference to the makeup of the commission membership in section 8-1008(E): TO THE EXTENT PRACTICABLE, THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMISSION SHALL REFLECT THE RACIAL, ETHNIC, GEOGRAPHIC, GENDER, **DISABILITY**, AND ECONOMIC DIVERSITY OF THE STATE.

For these reasons, DRM supports House Bill 344 with the requested amendment.

Respectfully,
Gabriel H. Rubinstein, Esq.
Assistant Managing Attorney
Disability Rights Maryland
1500 Union Ave., Suite 2000
Baltimore, MD 21211
Direct: 443-692-2483
GabrielR@DisabilityRightsMD.org