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Testimony in Support of HB 18
Vehicle Laws - Noise Abatement Monitoring Systems Pilot Program - Inspection and Extension

This bill would extend a pilot program for Montgomery and Prince George's Counties to use automated noise cameras on roads. The bill has the unanimous support of the Montgomery County House Delegation and the Prince George's County House Delegation.

In 2024, the State enacted legislation authorizing these counties to each use up to three noise abatement monitoring systems to detect vehicles that are excessively loud. In the fall of 2024, both counties passed local laws to create noise camera pilot programs. The counties are now going through the procurement process to select a camera vendor. They are also identifying locations where cameras will be installed; per state law, the county must first provide public notice of the proposed locations and install signage near each camera.

All told, roughly half of the two-year pilot will have elapsed before any cameras are installed. This short time frame does not leave the counties enough time to gather data to meaningfully evaluate the program, as is required under state law.

HB 18 would extend the sunset date for the Montgomery and Prince George's pilot programs by two years. Additionally, the bill corrects an oversight from the 2024 bill by adding noise abatement monitoring systems to an existing prohibition against inspecting recorded images. The state's other automated enforcement laws (red light cameras, speed cameras, and work zone cameras) have such a prohibition.

Background: Noise Cameras

Noise from vehicles with illegally modified exhaust systems is a growing problem in communities across the state. Overly loud vehicles are a quality-of-life concern for community members, especially those adjacent to multi-lane highways where racing engines can be heard blocks away.

Maryland and federal regulations both establish a maximum sound limit of 80 decibels for vehicles sold and operating on our state's roads.^{1,2} Under current law, it's illegal to modify a vehicle's exhaust system or to operate a vehicle that exceeds this threshold.

By using noise cameras, counties can address excessive noise concerns without increasing traffic stops by law enforcement. Noise cameras work similarly to speed cameras, with the technology placed adjacent to a road, where it measures the loudness of each vehicle that drives past. If a vehicle exceeds 85 decibels, the noise camera is triggered to take a picture of the license plate of the offending vehicle.

The cameras are sophisticated enough to recognize the difference between different types of sound by monitoring the noise pattern. As such, these noise cameras can specifically look for noise caused by illegally modified exhaust pipes and mufflers and souped up engines.

Each citation is reviewed by county police for accuracy and compliance with the law before it is sent to the vehicle owner. State law also mandates that the first citation be a warning.

Automated Enforcement by Other Jurisdictions

Several states and cities have taken action to authorize and start using noise cameras. The states of New York and California enacted legislation to authorize pilot programs. In 2024, Connecticut passed a law to allow local governments to use noise cameras.

New York City has been using noise cameras for more than 3 years and is rapidly expanding their program. Their program has been very successful in detecting cars with illegally modified exhaust systems and getting vehicles into compliance with the law. In its pilot phase, New York used just one camera and caught over 500 violators. They subsequently added 7 new cameras and have approved the installation of 25 more by 2025, with up to 100 cameras anticipated by 2028.

Cameras have also been installed in Albuquerque, New Mexico; Knoxville, Tennessee; and Miami Beach, Florida. Washington, DC is considering the use of noise cameras. Worldwide, several jurisdictions currently use or will soon be deploying noise cameras, including in the United Kingdom, Australia, Paris, and Taipei.

¹ COMAR Section 11.14.07.13

² 40 CFR § 205.52