

Re: Favorable report on HB 0007 Vehicle Laws, Bicycles - Operation at Intersections

January 28, 2024

Dear Chair Korman, Vice Chair Boyce, and Committee Members,

Thank you for your service to Maryland. I am writing to ask that you support HB 0007 to make Maryland's roadways safer for bicyclists. HB 0007 would allow cyclists to treat stop signs as yield signs and continue moving through an intersection slowly and cautiously after ensuring it is safe to do so. Thank you Vice-Chair Boyce for co-sponsoring this bill.

Intersections are particularly dangerous for cyclists: the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reports that nearly 55 percent of cycling injuries occurring at intersections. At intersections, cyclists can be hit by inattentive or aggressive drivers who are behind them, making right turns, or accelerating to try and pass on the left after stopping. As one who bikes regularly for commuting and errands in my home district of D22/Route 1 corridor, D20/Takoma Park-Silver Spring Area, and beyond, I have had too many near misses with drivers making right turns who "didn't see" me, and have had aggressive drivers try to speed around me at a stop sign when there was not room to pass due to oncoming traffic.

In allowing cyclists to continue slowly through stop sign intersections when it is safe to do so, HB 0007 would reduce the risk of intersection crashes by making cyclists more visible to drivers and reducing their exposure to the risks of intersections. Data provide evidence for improved safety; eight states and the District of Columbia have adopted such "stop as yield" measures, including Delaware, where crashes at intersections involving bicycles dropped 23 percent in the following 2.5 years. Maryland should heed such data and allow stop as yield.

Bicyclists are subject to all of the same laws as drivers, though cyclists are far more vulnerable than drivers. Maryland should allow reasonable adjustments to the law to reduce cyclists' vulnerability and reduce deaths and injury at intersections. This, in turn, would increase the number of residents who are willing to cycle, reducing traffic congestion and climate impacts.

Allowing a stop as yield will also address racial inequities in traffic enforcement, as failing to stop is subject to a citation. In 2020, Bicycling Magazine analyzed data for police stops of cyclists in Washington, DC, Oakland and New Orleans and found that Black cyclists were disproportionately stopped relative to Whites. In DC, Blacks represented nearly 88 percent of stops despite being 46 percent of the population. Prior analyses, including one from the Department of Justice, found similar disparities in Tampa and Chicago. By removing one pretext for police interaction, HB 0007 will make streets safer and more inviting to cyclists of color.

Please provide a Favorable committee report on HB 0007 and support its passage in the Senate and General Assembly. Thank you for considering my comments.

Melissa A Schweisguth
Hyattsville, MD 20782 (D22)