

**Presbyterians for Police Transformation
Takoma Park Presbyterian Church**

**Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 292
Submitted to the
Maryland Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee**

January 28, 2025

Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify. As citizens of District 20 and 18 and as members of the Takoma Park Presbyterian Church organized as Presbyterians for Police Transformation, we want to indicate our strong support of Senate Bill 292, an Act concerning motor vehicles, secondary enforcement and admissibility of evidence.

We believe this legislation will improve public safety in at least three ways:

- by prioritizing policing of dangerous driving and serious traffic offenses, thereby increasing traffic safety and removing the burden on our police officers for enforcing non-safety-related infractions;
- by improving community trust of police and the rule of law; and
- by reducing the harm and trauma of individuals and families who are targeted in pretextual traffic stops.

Our church has an active racial justice initiative which helps inform our perspective on policing issues, as does the testimony of members of our congregation who are Black and whose families have experienced mistreatment from the police, including during pretextual traffic stops. We have seen first-hand, in our own community and congregation, that people of color are at greater risk of being stopped and searched, and that low level traffic stops exacerbate that disparity. We have also heard gripping and disheartening stories from our fellow congregants of the personal and family trauma resulting from pretextual and racial-profiled traffic stops.

While we're motivated by these experiences, our advocacy for the bill is guided by the data and research which reveal that states and cities with policies like those in SB 292 decrease racial disparities in traffic enforcement, result in fewer car crashes and traffic injuries/fatalities, and have little impact on non-traffic crime. The evidence shows that limiting non-safety-related traffic stops leads to improvements in traffic safety, reducing racial disparate outcomes, and does not lead to more crime. We urge you to examine the experience and data from Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Virginia where similar policies have been enacted at the state, county, or municipal level. This is a successful policy and one that is growing across the country.

We are keenly aware of the strong support within our congregation, and indeed within the state and country, for traffic enforcement to keep our roads safe for pedestrians, bicyclists, and cars. That is why we believe there is a smarter way to employ police for safety – by taking non-safety-related traffic enforcement off their plate so that police can focus their time and resources on

dangerous driving, including moving violations such as speeding, illegal turns, running red lights and stop signs, and reckless disregard for pedestrians.

Traffic stops are among the most common ways in which the public interacts with police. Traffic stop data at the national, state, county, and municipal levels show that police disproportionately stop people of color, often for pretextual reasons, and too often with devastating results. Thus, passage of this legislation would not only improve public safety but also decrease racial disparities. Importantly from an improved data collection and reporting perspective, the bill would require officers to document reasons for traffic stops on citations and police reports resulting from the stop.

The bill would helpfully expand the list of infractions that can be enforced only as secondary actions upon a stop predicated on dangerous driving violations. Broadly, this expanded list of secondary actions includes equipment issues -- such as a broken light or tinted window -- and administrative issues -- such as recently expired registration or license plate placement -- neither of which create an immediate safety risk to people inside and outside the vehicle. According to the Office of Crime Prevention and Policy's traffic safety dashboard, equipment and registration-related violations accounted for nearly 44 percent of traffic stops (over 200,000 annually) reported in 2022 and 2023, representing a significant amount of time that could be better spent dealing with dangerous driving and improving public safety.

In your discussions on the bill and its list of proposed secondary actions, we would urge that if there were any amendments to the bill as the legislative process continues, that any changes be evidence-based and not based on anecdotes. As more and more cities, counties, and states (including Virginia), adopt similar measures, there is a growing body of comparative law as well as outcome-based evidence to draw upon and we urge you to do just that.

In addition, if the Committee considers an amendment to create an exception clause when a clear and articulable case can be made for an immediate and serious threat to safety, we urge you to keep such language narrow and precisely tailored.

Finally, we urge you to retain the data collection and reporting provision in this bill. Without this provision, there will be less transparency and public accountability, both of which are vital to future reform efforts.

In sum, we urge you to pass this legislation. Doing so serves the cause of public safety and of racial equity.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.