

Bill: SB0590

Bill Title: Motor Vehicles - Reckless, Negligent,
and Aggressive Driving

Position: **Favorable**



Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee,

As a group which advocates for a built environment which is safe and convenient for all people, whether they are moving through that environment on foot, on a bicycle, in a wheelchair, via public transit, or in an automobile, we support SB0590.

Maryland's roadways are not safe, especially for vulnerable road users (VRUs). Despite the Vision Zero efforts of the past several years, those roadways have actually gotten less safe - for everyone. That said, aggressive driving isn't a major factor behind that decrease in safety. According to the Maryland Highway Safety Office (MHSO), during the most recent five-year reporting period, aggressive driving only accounted for an annual average of four percent of all injury crashes and seven percent of all fatal crashes in Maryland. [1]

The MHSO also states that, in 2022, only 532 citations were issued statewide for aggressive driving. They elaborate:

Difficulties exist in obtaining convictions for violating the aggressive driving statute because of the requirement that officers observe three separate driving violations to issue an aggressive driving citation. Law enforcement officers will not typically wait to observe three or more offenses before taking enforcement action. [1]

With this bill reducing the threshold for aggressive driving from the concurrent violation of **three** or more of the current law's **relatively short list** of offenses to the concurrent violation of **two** or more of this bill's **expanded list** of offenses, the above-listed percentages and numbers are bound to increase.

Given that this bill explicitly includes several offenses against VRUs in the list of offenses that qualify for aggressive driving, we find ourselves supporting this bill. The current bar for what constitutes aggressive driving would appear to be too low. At its heart, aggressive driving is the manifestation of a driver's conscious willingness to put the other road users around them at risk. The revised standards set by this bill reflect that.

To be clear, we agree with Strong Towns that we need to move beyond our fixation on assigning blame for automobile crashes on drivers. [2] Our current go-to tools of driver education campaigns, shaming incorrect behaviors, levying fines, and (with this bill) threatening imprisonment aren't going to get us to where we really want to be (Vision Zero).

We need to, instead, focus on a) better roadway designs that compel slower speeds and safer driving and b) truly **deprioritize** high vehicle speeds and automobile flow over the safety of VRUs. But, institutionalizing the crash analysis practices that Strong Towns has proven out will take time, as will the subsequent culture changes. Until then, we have to work within the parameters of the system we have today. In that light, we are in favor of this bill.

Whenever we find ourselves behind the wheel, we need to be fully aware of the harm we can inflict. Making imprisonment a possibility when driving aggressively (and expanding the list of- and lowering the bar for- what qualifies as aggressive driving) should help us all keep that awareness more top of mind.

We hope the committee finds these points helpful and convincing and we urge its members to **vote in favor of SB0590**. Thank you for your efforts and the opportunity for us to testify on this legislation.

[BaltPOP - Baltimoreans for People-Oriented Places](#)

References:

[1] Maryland Highway Safety Office. "2023 Annual Report". July 2024.

https://zerodeathsmd.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/MDOT_Annual_Report_2023_508.pdf

[2] Charles Marohn. "It's Time To Learn From Crashes and Create Safer Streets Today".

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<https://www.strongtowns.org/journal/2024/10/30/its-time-to-learn-from-crashes-and-create-safer-streets-today>

