

January 28, 2025

Rashad James  
209 Janwall Street  
Annapolis, MD 21403

### **Testimony before the Judiciary Proceedings Committee in Support of Senate Bill 292**

My name is Rashad James. I am a policy associate with a nonprofit organization that works with law enforcement agencies across the nation to make public safety systems more equitable and effective. I am also a Maryland resident and a member of the Maryland Bar.

I strongly support SB-292 because it prioritizes enforcement of traffic infractions that truly impact road safety—namely, causing crashes and traffic fatalities—versus non-safety equipment or registration issues. Currently, nearly half of all traffic stops in Maryland are based on these non-safety infractions, far outnumbering serious offenses like reckless driving.

I would like to share a personal experience that opened my eyes to the need for SB-292. Several years ago, I was a passenger when my father was stopped simply because of an air freshener hanging from the rearview mirror. Although the traffic stop was not too long and we were let go with a warning, it left us both somewhat anxious and confused as to why such a minor thing warranted a stop by law enforcement. Experiences like this have made me question how this kind of enforcement truly serves public safety, especially where there are far more serious violations that put people's lives at risk.

Unfortunately, experiences like ours are not unique. In Maryland, Black drivers make up 43% of all vehicle stops but only 30% of the population, and are four times more likely to be subjected to warrantless stops than White drivers.<sup>1</sup> In addition, Black and Latino drivers are more likely to have use of force used against them at non-safety stops than during safety stops.<sup>2</sup> These routine non-safety stops erode community trust, especially in communities of color. Moreover, data shows that low-level traffic stops rarely result in the recovery of weapons or contraband, but waste valuable time and resources that could be better used to address more serious safety

---

<sup>1</sup> Governor's Office of Crime Prevention and Policy. Race-Based Traffic Stop Data Dashboard. <https://gocpp.maryland.gov/data-dashboards/traffic-stop-data-dashboard/>

<sup>2</sup> Graham, M., Neath, S., Buchanan, K., Mulligan, K., et. al. Racial disparities in use of force at traffic stops. [https://policingequity.org/traffic-safety/83-data-brief-use-of-force-at-traffic-stops/file?utm\\_campaign=uof-ro-undup-2024&utm\\_medium=email&\\_hsenc=p2ANqtz-\\_oadNhqJcxYZQjB6OWkPicHs5E6I4QwC3LG7yHNH8FszONdAVgKYrv3Q8nHtFBcJ\\_Kiuw\\_B5yr9EqWbNNfk7LTbGgp1eruRe5cJGj20z3hj0FDMz4&\\_hsmi=315048802&utm\\_source=hubspot](https://policingequity.org/traffic-safety/83-data-brief-use-of-force-at-traffic-stops/file?utm_campaign=uof-ro-undup-2024&utm_medium=email&_hsenc=p2ANqtz-_oadNhqJcxYZQjB6OWkPicHs5E6I4QwC3LG7yHNH8FszONdAVgKYrv3Q8nHtFBcJ_Kiuw_B5yr9EqWbNNfk7LTbGgp1eruRe5cJGj20z3hj0FDMz4&_hsmi=315048802&utm_source=hubspot)

concerns.<sup>3</sup>

Police departments and commissions across the United States have recognized that enforcement of low-level traffic violations does not improve road safety and drives disparities. Fayetteville, NC; New Haven, CT and others have all started initiatives to reduce the number of low-safety-risk stops allowing officers to focus on the safety-related violations that impact road safety.

When Fayetteville, North Carolina's police department shifted their enforcement priorities, safety-related stops increased from 30% to 80% of all traffic stops, traffic fatalities dropped by 28%, racial disparities were significantly reduced, and crime remained the same.<sup>4</sup> Similar policy changes across the country have seen large increased numbers of stops that resulted in DUI arrests as well as lowered overall crime rates.<sup>5</sup>

With my background in policy and research, it is evident that these low-level stops do not improve public safety and instead contribute to racial disparities. As a Maryland resident, I do not want our state's limited resources diverted to practices that do not truly promote traffic safety or community well-being.

SB-292 will help to ensure that the efforts of law enforcement are actually focused on safety concerns while also strengthening trust between officers and the communities they serve. SB-292 is a change we need in Maryland and I urge you to support it.

---

<sup>3</sup> Bandes, 2018. p. 1768; New Jersey Legislature Senate Judiciary Committee. (2006). Report of the New Jersey Senate Judiciary Committee's investigation of racial profiling and the New Jersey State Police. p. 55. [dspace.njstatelib.org/xmlui/handle/10929/25067](https://space.njstatelib.org/xmlui/handle/10929/25067)

<sup>4</sup> Fliss, M.D., Baumgartner, F., Delamater, P. et al. (2020). Re-prioritizing traffic stops to reduce motor vehicle crash outcomes and racial disparities. *Injury Epidemiology*, 7(3). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40621-019-0227-6>

<sup>5</sup> Condon, T. (2022, January 31). After a poor start, CT anti-racial profiling effort is making progress. *Hartford Courant*. <https://www.courant.com/politics/hc-pol-racial-profiling-20220131-s3goxbcd5fgv7blw4uejfe7gte-story.html>; Ross, M. B., Kalinowski, J. J., & Barone, K. (2020). Testing for disparities in traffic stops: Best practices from the Connecticut model. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 19(4), 1289–1303. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-9133.12528>