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Judicial Proceedings Committee
Executive Nominations Committee

Senate Chair
Joint Committee on
Children, Youth, and Families

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Testimony of Senator Mary-Dulany James
In Favor of SB 883 - Commercial Law - Statutory Liens - Motor Vehicles
Towed or Removed From Parking Lots
Before the Judicial Proceedings Committee on March 4th, 2025**

Dear Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the Committee,

Senate Bill 883 creates a statutory possessory lien on motor vehicles that are lawfully towed from private parking lots pursuant to a contract between the towing company and the lot owner. While the drafting rules of the Department of Legislative Services have SB 883 amending the laws governing the statutory liens on personal property contained in the Commercial Law Article (see Title 10 §16-101 through Commercial Law Article Title 10 §16-209 of the Maryland Annotated Code), the bill is also aimed at clarifying that a towing company has the right to be paid all statutorily recognized charges before the vehicle is released to the owner pursuant to the provisions contained in the Transportation Article of the Maryland Annotated Code, Title 21, Subtitle 10A, which governs the towing or removal of vehicles from parking lots.

When you read Title 21, Subtitle 10A of the Transportation Article – specifically section 21-10A-05 (Delivery to Storage Facility; Repossession by Owner; Before or After Towing; Payment) – and see how the various subcomponents of this subtitle work together, it is clear that they operate so that while the towing company must provide the vehicle owner with the continuous opportunity to retake possession (see (a) (3)), the opportunity is premised on the owner paying the outstanding towing charges and compelling the towing company to accept such payment (see subparagraphs (c) and (2)). This operation is made even clearer by the anticipation of the situation that, even if the owner has not yet made the requisite payment in order to repossess the vehicle, the towing company is still legally required to allow the owner to inspect or retrieve items from the vehicle while it is still in the possession of the towing company (see subparagraph (3)).

My research could find only one reported case in Maryland that appears to be instructive. In *Glenn Cade T/A G & G Towing, et al v. Montgomery County, Maryland* 83 Md App. 419 575

A 20 744 (1990), the Court of Special Appeals upheld the constitutionality of a local county law that allowed towing from private parking lots passed pursuant to the predecessor statute to Article 21 Section 10A Transportation Code (see 26-301 (b) (3) 1987 & Supplemental 1989). In so doing, the court said that while the issue of whether the towing company had a possessory lien was not preserved on appeal, nonetheless, there was an implied agreement between the vehicle owner and the towing company whereby the vehicle owner agreed to pay the towing and storage charges. The court approvingly referenced other state statutes that hold the vehicle owner parking in defiance of a posted parking restriction, “shall be deemed to have consented to the removal and storage of their vehicle as well as to payment of charges for its removal and storage.”

It is time for the Maryland legislature to make its intentions known explicitly and, thereby, relieve the State courts from attempting to understand the legal implications of our towing from private property statutes. It is clear from a survey of other states that in the modern era, states are tending away from the common law, and instead are routinely creating statutory possessory liens in favor of towing companies that remove motor vehicles from private property after having complied with all applicable towing laws (well-posted signage, towed only a reasonable distance, capped towing fees, adequate notice, an opportunity to inspect, retrieve items, and opportunity to retake the vehicle after allowable charges are paid). Such states include Idaho, Illinois, Florida, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Colorado, Delaware, and a number of others.

I also would like to note that it was brought to my attention that the legislation was not entirely clear regarding whether the lien could be attached to any personal property in a vehicle. To address this, I am offering a sponsor amendment to clarify that the lien does not apply to any personal items that are not attached to the motor vehicle subject to the lien. The amendment also clarifies that the owner shall have the opportunity to retrieve any property from the vehicle.

Thank you for your consideration of Senate Bill 883 and I ask that the committee issue a favorable report with the sponsor amendment.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mary-Dulany James". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

Senator Mary-Dulany James