

MARYLAND HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE HEARING:

Public Hearing on House Bill 635, Feb. 12, 2025

TESTIMONY SUBMITTED *via email*:

Feb. 10, 2025

**TESTIMONY OF CHARMIN LEON OF CENTER FOR POLICING EQUITY IN
SUPPORT OF H.B. 635**

My name is Charmin Leon, and I served nearly 13 years at the Cleveland Division of Police in Ohio. Currently, I am the Director of Law Enforcement Initiatives at the Center for Policing Equity, a research and action organization made up of former law enforcement, academics, and community engagement specialists that uses scientific research to identify and reduce racial disparities in policing.

House Bill 635 is an important step towards preserving officer resources and morale, addressing equity, and improving traffic safety across the state of Maryland. Passing this bill would bring law enforcement in Maryland in line with evidence-based policing that is the modern standard of our profession, and would better allocate police resources towards practices that can actually make all of our communities safer.

I spent years on patrol as well as leading the background investigation and recruitment units. In that time, I found that officers who focused on non-safety stops were the least effective at discovering serious crimes and had a major negative impact on the morale of other officers who had to pick up their extra slack. Maryland law enforcement currently expend a significant portion of their capacity on non-safety related violations. State data from 2023 show that 44% of all traffic stops are for equipment- or registration-related violations,¹ while equipment violations were a contributing factor in just 0.2% of vehicles involved in fatal crashes.² This is not a good use of limited police resources.

When officers devote so much of their time to these non-safety related stops, it prevents them from focusing on behavior that actually endangers public safety. It is not an effective crime fighting strategy and does not improve road safety. Studies show that these stops rarely uncover

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

² NHTSA, Fatality & Injury Reporting System Tool. (filter: vehicles, vehicles involved in fatal crashes, Maryland, contributing circumstances: headlights; or signal lights; or other lights; or mirrors; or windows/windshield, 2018-2022).

guns or other contraband.³ At a time when law enforcement agencies across the country are experiencing a crisis of officer recruitment and retention, it is imperative that law enforcement resources are focused on public safety interventions that are impactful, for the sake of both efficiency and officer morale.

Deprioritizing low-level enforcement *has* proven successful in improving road safety and enhancing racial equity. 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 reported crime rates remained the same.⁴ When Newington, Connecticut shifted their enforcement focus, DUI arrest rates increased by 250%.⁵ And while focusing more on driving infractions that contribute to crashes, law enforcement in Philadelphia recovered more guns from traffic stops.⁶

Finally, this bill would also improve racial disparities in Maryland policing. Currently, Black drivers constitute at least 43% of all vehicle traffic stops, despite only making up 30% of the state's population.⁷ Additionally, Black drivers are over four times more likely to be subjected to a warrantless vehicle search than White drivers.⁸ Such unnecessary stops are—at best—traumatic for Black community members and undermine the public's confidence in the law enforcement profession.

HB 635 is a proven, common-sense solution to the issues of road safety, racial equity, and officer morale that public safety professionals in Maryland face every day. This bill would be a win for all Marylanders, and I urge you to vote in its favor. Thank you.

Charmin Leon
Director, Law Enforcement Initiatives
Center for Policing Equity

³ Baumgartner, F. R., Epp, D. A., & Shoub, K. (2018). *Suspect citizens: What 20 million traffic stops tell us about policing and race*. Cambridge University Press. pp. 54, 230.

⁴ Fliss, M. D., Baumgartner, F., Delamater, P., Marshall, S., Poole, C., & Robinson, W. (2020). Re-prioritizing traffic stops to reduce motor vehicle crash outcomes and racial disparities. *Injury Epidemiology*, 7(1), 3.
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s40621-019-0227-6>

⁵ Condon, T. (2022, January 31). After poor start, CT anti-racial profiling effort is making progress. *Hartford Courant*.

⁶ Monroe, H. (2023, March 3). New Philly law takes weapons off the streets, data shows. *CBS News Philadelphia*.
<https://www.cbsnews.com/philadelphia/news/new-philly-law-takes-weapons-off-the-streets-data-shows/>

⁷ *Race-Based Traffic Stop Data Dashboard*.

⁸ Ibid.