
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 635
Motor Vehicles - Secondary Enforcement and Admissibility of Evidence
Judiciary Committee
February 12, 2025

Social Work Advocates for Social Change strongly support HB 635, which will reduce the number of non-safety-related traffic stops by limiting the enforcement of non-safety-related violations (i.e., driving with expired tags, broken taillights, or tinted windows, etc.) to relegation as a secondary offense; these violations cannot be the primary reason for a traffic stop. They can only be included after a violation of another provision of the Maryland code Traffic stops for minor violations expend significant officer time and resources, contribute to racial disparities in law enforcement practices, harm community-police relations, compound financial hardship for those already in poverty, and increase the likelihood for dangerous confrontations.

According to data gathered by the Governor's office of Crime Prevention and Policy, in 2023, there were 482,299 traffic stops in Maryland, and 43% were for non-safety-related violations, like registration and equipment violations.¹ Though stops are usually routine, with both the officer and the driver leaving unharmed, significant risks are present, nonetheless. In 2024, Bowie State Professor James Hyman developed a report that explored how police feel during traffic stops. His findings indicate that police often feel anxious and apprehensive during traffic stops, likely due to various unknown factors present during these stops². Once a stop is initiated, police must walk up to a vehicle with little idea of who is in the car, what that person's state of mind may be, or any other information about the driver. Any deviation from the expected can quickly turn a routine traffic stop into a violent encounter.

According to the Governor's Office of Crime Prevention and Policy data, Black drivers were stopped in 46% of non-safety related stops and were 65% of non-safety related searches.³ According to the Census Bureau, roughly 31.6% of the state's population identifies as Black. However, 71% of the state's prison population is Black⁴ and 62% of people killed by police in Maryland since 2013 have been Black.⁵ From 1993-

¹ Governor's Office of Crime Prevention and Policy (GOCPP). (2023). Race-based traffic stop data dashboard. [Data set]. <https://gocpp.maryland.gov/data-dashboards/traffic-stop-data-dashboard/>

² Thompson, D. (2024, April 17). Dialogue With Law Enforcement and Community Encouraged. From Bowie State University: <https://bowiestate.edu/about/news/2024/new-report-reveals-police-officers-perspectives-on-traffic-stops.php>

³ Governor's Office of Crime Prevention and Policy (GOCPP). (2023)

⁴ Prison Policy Initiative. (2021). Incarcerated populations by race/ethnicity and gender for each state. [Data set]. <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/data/#state>

⁵ Mapping Police Violence. (2024). Full database. [Data set]. <https://mappingpoliceviolence.us>

2008, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) brought numerous lawsuits against Maryland State Police (MSP) for frequently profiling and targeting Black motorists. Though MSP ultimately entered into a consent decree to provide detailed information to the Maryland NAACP regarding profiling complaints, racial disparities in traffic stops persist to this day. In 2023, 43% of people subjected to a traffic stop in Maryland were Black and the percentage of Black people stopped in each county was higher than the population of Black people residing in that county.⁶ These racial disparities further the distrust of police by communities. Decreasing negative interactions with police will serve to increase community police relations.

Maryland police can issue a Safety Equipment Repair Order (SERO) during a traffic stop. This repair order requires that the driver has the repair done, inspected then certified completed by an authorized mechanic, or police officer. The Maryland Department of Transportation outlines the equipment that can be included in a SERO. The driver has 30 days to return the SERO then their vehicle registration will be suspended. This is one example of how a traffic stop can lead to financial hardship. While the responsibility of owning and driving a vehicle is to maintain the safety of the operation of that vehicle, being pulled over carries additional fines and financial responsibility. Repairing a blown brake light can cost around \$200 looking at local retailers in Maryland. If a person is pulled over for a blown brake light, which they probably didn't realize was blown, they can receive a fine and be required to have a licensed mechanic inspect the vehicle. Maryland vehicle inspections generally range in cost from \$60 to \$100 or more. The additional fees associated with a traffic stop can increase the financial burden of vehicle ownership.

Maryland has a chance to lower the encounters police have with the populace, employ a more efficient use of traffic policing, and create a safer environment for police and the populace.

Social Work Advocates for Social Change urges a favorable HB 635.

Social Work Advocates for Social Change is a coalition of MSW students at the University of Maryland School of Social Work that seeks to promote equity and justice through public policy, and to engage the communities impacted by public policy in the policymaking process.

⁶ Governor's Office of Crime Prevention and Policy (GOCPP). (2023)