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Testimony to the House Judiciary Committee
HB-635: Motor Vehicles - Secondary Enforcement and Admissibility of Evidence
Position: Favorable

February 09, 2025

The Honorable Luke Clippinger, Chair
Judiciary Committee
6 Bladen St., Annapolis, Maryland: Room #100, Taylor House Office Building,
Annapolis, Maryland, 21401
cc: Members, Judiciary Committee

Dear Chair Clippinger and Members of the Committee:

My name is Jordy Diaz, and I am an Organizer with Young People for Progress (YPP), a member-based civic and social justice organization of youth and young adults in Montgomery County. We strongly support the introduction of HB-635, Motor Vehicles - Secondary Enforcement and Admissibility of Evidence, which we believe is a necessary step toward creating a more equitable and effective traffic enforcement system.

The HB-635 bill seeks to reclassify certain minor traffic infractions as secondary offenses. This means that police officers cannot stop drivers solely for these infractions, which include issues like driving with expired registration tags or tinted windows. The bill aims to reduce unnecessary traffic stops that disproportionately impact marginalized communities and divert law enforcement resources from more serious safety concerns.

As an organization deeply rooted in the experiences of young people of color, we are all too familiar with the harms caused by minor traffic stops. These encounters often lead to fear, financial hardship, and in some cases, unnecessary escalation. Unfortunately, the data shows that these stops disproportionately target Black and Brown drivers, exacerbating systemic inequities. From 2018 to 2022 in Montgomery County, Black drivers made up 30% of traffic stops and Latinx drivers 21%, despite comprising only 18% and 19% of the county's population, respectively.¹ These disparities heighten the risk of harm, as interactions with police during traffic stops can escalate unnecessarily, placing drivers—especially people of color—in situations of stress, fear, and even violence.

Moreover, these stops are largely ineffective in addressing public safety. Montgomery County data from 2022 shows that firearms were recovered in less than 0.5% of traffic stops.² This demonstrates that focusing on minor infractions, like a broken taillight or expired registration, diverts valuable law enforcement resources from addressing genuinely dangerous violations.

The approach proposed in this bill has been proven to work. For example, Fayetteville, North Carolina, deprioritized minor traffic stops and instead focused on serious safety violations. As a result, they saw a decrease in racial disparities in traffic enforcement without compromising

¹ OLO Memorandum Report 2022-12: Analysis of data Montgomery Traffic Violations Dataset, Montgomery County Council. (2022, October 25). https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OLO/Resources/Files/2022_reports/OLOREport2022-12.pdf

² Discussion: OLO Memorandum Report 2022-21: Analysis of Data Montgomery County Traffic Violations Dataset, Montgomery County Council Transportation & Environment/Public Safety Committees. (2023, February 6). https://www.youtube.com/live/y0d_5_FhGxo

public safety outcomes.³ This shows that we can adopt smarter, fairer traffic enforcement practices that focus on what truly matters: keeping our roads safe.

By reclassifying certain minor infractions as secondary offenses, this bill ensures that drivers are not stopped for issues that pose no immediate safety threat. It also strengthens accountability by requiring officers to document the reasons for each stop and provide identification to drivers, fostering transparency and trust.

Passing this bill is a critical step in addressing the long-standing disparities in our traffic enforcement system. It will help reduce harm to marginalized communities, rebuild trust in law enforcement, and ensure that our state's policies reflect the values of fairness, safety, and equity. Together, we can create a system that works for all Maryland residents.

I respectfully urge the committee to issue a favorable report on HB-635. Thank you for your time and commitment to public safety and equity.

Sincerely,
Jordy Diaz
Organizer, Young People for Progress

³ 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>

