

February 12, 2025

**TESTIMONY OF THE POLICING PROJECT AT NYU SCHOOL OF LAW
TO THE HOUSE OF DELEGATES JUDICIARY COMMITTEE OF THE STATE OF
MARYLAND
IN SUPPORT OF H.B. 635**

Dear Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Bartlett, and Committee Members:

The Policing Project is an organization dedicated to ensuring democratic accountability in policing by giving communities and their elected representatives a voice in how law enforcement agencies operate. We believe that by democratically setting expectations *before* police act, instead of *after* something has gone wrong, we can achieve meaningful public safety for all people. We have advised police departments and elected officials in more than a dozen jurisdictions to create and adopt such policies in the traffic enforcement context. We have also conducted research on the public safety impacts of reducing low-risk traffic stops and drafted model state-level legislation to reduce pretextual traffic stops.

H.B. 635 is a common-sense measure that limits police enforcement of a series of non-safety violations, such as expired registrations, inspection or emission stickers, items hanging from the rearview mirror, or a missing headlight or taillight. At least 12 state or local governments have passed measures to limit similar non-safety stops, including Virginia and Oregon. We urge this Committee to support this important measure, which will make Maryland's roads safer and more just.

Data from Maryland confirms what has been shown across the country: traffic stops are frequently made for low-level violations unrelated to road safety. These non-safety stops are often initiated because of goals unrelated to road safety: either as a pretext to conduct a search to find crime, or to increase the local government's revenue by writing more total citations. But neither of these reasons contribute to effective policing. Evidence is clear that randomly stumbling upon serious crime during a traffic stop is a rarity. And relying upon quantity of traffic tickets in order to reward performance or generate revenue, no matter their relevance to crash outcomes, incentivizes policing for profit rather than safety.

Non-safety stops do little to make roadways safer, use limited police resources inefficiently, fuel racial discrimination, and undermine public safety. In [2023](#), about 44% of traffic stops in Maryland were made for reasons related to equipment, license, or registration violations, while just 13% were made for moving violations or reckless driving. But Maryland's Highway Safety Office [reports](#) that speed, aggressive driving, distracted driving, and impaired driving are the major contributors to crashes and fatalities – not dark window tint or broken windshield wipers. By spending so much of their limited time on minor, non-safety violations, Maryland officers are missing the opportunity to stop truly dangerous behaviors

on the road.

Traffic policing that relies on low-level stops is inefficient in other ways, as well. Traffic stops for non-safety offenses are less likely to result in an arrest made than stops related to the leading causes of crashes: speeding and dangerous driving. In addition, the pretextual motivations for many of these stops lead to inefficiency. Unsurprisingly, when police search for crimes based on a specific reason, rather than an unfounded or biased hunch, they are [more successful](#) in that endeavor.

Focusing traffic enforcement on non-safety stops also results in disproportionately policing drivers of color. Stops for non-safety equipment and paperwork reasons in Maryland, as well as throughout the country, have greater racial disparities. Coupled with the fact that non-safety stops are [more likely](#) to end in police use of force than safety stops, this signals an urgent need for change. Indeed, a recent [report](#) found that racial disparities in Montgomery County Police Department traffic stops have persisted or worsened between 2018 and 2022.

Low-level traffic stops don't move the needle on roadway safety, and they don't move the needle on broader public safety, either. The Policing Project [studied](#) traffic stops in Nashville, Tennessee where just 0.7% of stops resulted in an arrest for something that might have an impact on future crime. The Nashville Police Department reduced its traffic stops for non-moving violations significantly, with crime rates remaining unchanged. In addition, people who have recently been stopped are significantly [less likely](#) to report neighborhood problems to law enforcement.

Other jurisdictions—such as [Fayetteville, North Carolina](#), [St. Paul, Minnesota](#), [Philadelphia](#), [Los Angeles](#), [Seattle](#), and several [Connecticut cities](#)—have shown that limiting traffic stops for non-safety offenses is associated with reduced racial disparities in police contact, increased arrests for moving violations, fewer serious crashes, and either unchanged or reduced crime rates.

By creating clear guidelines on how and when officers may conduct traffic stops, H.B. 635 makes significant strides towards more effective and equitable policing. We thank the Committee and the Chair for their consideration of this important piece of legislation.