

MARYLAND HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE HEARING:

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

TESTIMONY SUBMITTED *via email*:

Feb. 10, 2025

TESTIMONY OF CHRIS BURBANK IN SUPPORT OF H.B. 635

My name is Chris Burbank, I am the former Police Chief of Salt Lake City and spent nine years in that position. During that time I served as Vice President of the Major Cities Chiefs, an association of the 70 largest cities in the United States and Canada. Additionally, I am past President of the FBI National Executive Institute Associates. Currently, I am with the Center for Policing Equity, a research and action organization that uses science to identify and reduce the causes of racial disparities in public safety.

Whenever we speak of changes to traditional law enforcement activities, arrests, searches, and tickets we are met with an uninformed rebuttal of crime rising and chaos on our roadways. This is simply not accurate. There is not a scientific correlation between the beloved, TV-making actions of policing and increased safety in our communities. Crime, and yes, traffic crashes have traditionally run independent of policing activities.

HB 635 represents an educated step towards prioritizing a limited and specialized resource, policing. In New Haven, Connecticut when the chief reprioritized traffic enforcement to focus on dangerous driving the department reported a six percent reduction in equipment and administrative offenses, accidents dropped by ten percent, and crime dropped by five percent.¹ I'm not going to tell you crime is going to decrease because of this bill. More importantly, I'm telling you the opposition's gloom is inaccurate. I will tell you what the benefits of passing this bill will be; enhanced trust and confidence in government, decreased racial disparities in enforcement and improved law enforcement legitimacy.

This bill is not tying the hands of law enforcement. The Constitution of the United States is not a tool of law enforcement but rather a boundary, setting forth a minimum standard of conduct. The practice of enforcement should not walk us near that precipice. We have individuals in this country with hundreds of documented police initiated encounters. These encounters are not ending in prison sentences for acts of violence, they are not enhancing public safety. They are,

¹ Ross, M. B., Kalinowski, J. J., & Barone, K. (2020). Testing for disparities in traffic stops: Best practices from the Connecticut model. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 19(4), 1289–1303. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-9133.12528>



most certainly, adding to the disparate outcomes of policing and decimating neighborhoods across Maryland and the Nation. Pretext stops are not effective at keeping communities safe.²

We can do better. The economic and social cost of traffic enforcement for non-safety infractions outweighs any benefit. The time has come for us to ask of policing, “should we?” as opposed to “can we?” I encourage you to support HB 635.

Chris Burbank
Salt Lake City Police Chief (Retired), Center for Policing Equity

² Dias, M., Epp, D. A., Roman, M., & Walker, H. L. (2024). Consent searches: Evaluating the usefulness of a common and highly discretionary police practice. *Journal of Empirical Legal Studies*, 21(1), 35–91.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/jels.12377>