



LEGISLATIVE BLACK CAUCUS OF MARYLAND, INC.

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February 12, 2025

Chair Luke Clippinger

Judiciary Committee

100 Taylor House Office Building

Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Chair Clippinger and Members of the Committee,

The Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland offers its strong and favorable support for House Bill 635 (HB635) – Motor Vehicles – Secondary

Enforcement and Admissibility of Evidence. This bill reclassifies some non-violent traffic violations as secondary actions, requires documentation of all traffic stop reasons, makes evidence obtained from unlawful stops inadmissible in court, and establishes accountability measures for officers who violate these provisions. HB635 addresses long-standing racial disparities in policing by reducing pretextual traffic stops while promoting police transparency and accountability. **This bill is a 2025 legislative priority for the Black Caucus.**

Studies have consistently shown that Black drivers are more likely to experience racial profiling during routine traffic stops. The Stanford Open Policing Project's analysis of almost 100 million traffic stops across the United States—including data from Baltimore and Maryland State Police stops—revealed that Black and Hispanic drivers are searched more often than white drivers, despite white drivers being more likely to be found with contraband. Additionally, researchers discovered that this disparity disappears in the evening when visibility makes it more difficult to identify a vehicle's driver. This pattern contributes to a cycle of over-policing in Black communities, eroding public trust and exacerbating systemic inequalities in law enforcement. In Maryland, this racial disparity is evident in the Governor's Office of Crime Prevention and Policies Traffic Safety Dashboard, which reported that while Black individuals made up 32% of the state's population in 2023, they accounted for 43% of the 482,300 traffic stops conducted by 131 law enforcement agencies.

By limiting primary enforcement for certain non-violent infractions and increasing accountability measures, HB635 enhances public safety and promotes fair policing practices. The bill ensures that law enforcement resources are directed toward more serious traffic violations and criminal activities rather than disproportionately targeting communities of color for minor infractions.

Additionally, evidence from unlawful stops will be deemed inadmissible in court, safeguarding constitutional rights and reinforcing legal protections against

discriminatory practices. According to research from the Maryland Office of the Public Defender and the Vera Institute of Justice, reducing pretextual stops lowers unnecessary police interactions that can escalate into confrontations, arrests, or tragic outcomes, while also improving community-police relations.

A critical provision of HB635 is the restriction on primary stops for vehicle registration violations that have expired within four months. This change prevents unnecessary law enforcement encounters over administrative issues, which disproportionately affect lower-income individuals who may face financial barriers to timely registration renewals. Instead, it allows for compliance without excessive police intervention, aligning with broader efforts to prioritize equitable and just policing.

For these reasons, the Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland strongly supports HB635.

Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland