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DEPUTY MAJORITY WHIP

Judicial Proceedings Committee

Executive Nominations Committee

Joint Committees

Administrative, Executive, and
Legislative Review

Children, Youth, and Families

Senate Chair, Legislative Ethics



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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony for Senate Bill 55
Motor Vehicles - Secondary Enforcement
and Admissibility of Evidence
Before the Judicial Proceeding Committee
January 20, 2026

Good afternoon, Chair Smith, and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee,

Senate Bill 55 recategorizes several traffic violations from primary to secondary violations to prioritize safety and focus law enforcement resources where they are needed most. This reintroduction of last year's Senate Bill 292 has substantial changes that we have made as a result from extensive and ongoing conversations with key stakeholders and constituents. However, I first want to revisit my personal experience with a traffic stop that I first shared with this committee last year.

In 2019, I was pulled over with my entire family during a vacation in Virginia¹. As the officer's lights flashed and I pulled over to the shoulder, my three girls (age 9, 10, and 13 at the time) asked "why did he stop you daddy? What did you do wrong? Are you going to jail?" The entire family shared my anxiety, as I rolled down the window. I thought about Philando Castile, and countless others who did not survive routine traffic stops. I've been pulled over before and it is stressful, but good officers can usually put a driver at ease with clear communication and respect. But this trooper was harsh. He was condescending. It felt as though he was attempting to emasculate me in front of my wife and kids. And what was it all for? Driving too slow in the left lane. I explained to the officer that I had seen a speed limit sign of 45, but he rudely told me that was only when the lights were flashing. This distressing experience left a mark on me. Not only did this unnecessary interaction have no public safety purpose, it made my entire family feel unsafe.

That same year after receiving a tip from a concerned citizen regarding traffic disparities, I set out to uncover the traffic stop data from Baltimore County. After some effort, the data was made available and it was stark. The data showed that Black drivers were 73% more likely to be stopped by the Baltimore County Police than white drivers. Black drivers made up 56.25% of traffic stops in 2018, while making up just 26.1% of the population.²

¹ [Driving too slow — a pretext for a Va. traffic stop – Baltimore Sun](#)

² <https://www.wbalTV.com/article/work-group-racial-disparities-baltimore-county-police-traffic-stops/29669764>

It was this revelation that led to the creation of, and my service on, the Baltimore County's Equitable Policing Workgroup in 2020. Our Workgroup was organized to analyze available traffic stop data in Baltimore County and make recommendations on policies and practices on how to ensure equitable policing and bring greater transparency and accountability to department. In the Workgroup's *2023 Traffic Stop Deep Dive Report*, Baltimore County's Police Chief Robert McCullough has recognized the implementation of training programs including implicit bias, fair and impartial policing, active bystandership for law enforcement, de-escalation, and mindfulness.³ These programs may have had an effect in conjunction with public scrutiny, considering that bias could be inferred in data between 2017 and 2019, but could not be inferred between 2020 and 2022, after their implementation. However, the disparities *after* traffic stops occur continue to persist.

The report stated "Black drivers are far more likely to have their person or vehicle searched for probable cause during a traffic stop, even though these stops are less likely to find contraband for Black drivers compared to white drivers." The report also found "that Hispanic drivers are issued citations at a higher rate than both Black and white drivers."

While I appreciate our chief's efforts and I believe he and his police force are likely the rule rather than the exception, it is these disparities that spur me to seek and introduce a legislative remedy. Data produced by the Equitable Policing Workgroup in 2024 has revealed that 56.2% of traffic stops involve Black drivers, despite making up 33.5% of the county's population. While some improvement has been made after accounting for population growth of the Black community, traffic stops remain significantly disproportionate. When looking at the data, that is an irrefutable fact.

Today, I am here to testify in support of Senate Bill 55, which would change the categorization of certain low-level traffic infractions from primary offenses to secondary for enforcement purposes.

When a law enforcement officer conducts a traffic stop, there are two categories that stops can fall into: primary and secondary violations.

Primary violations allow an officer to initiate a traffic stop because of an immediate risk to the safety of the driver and others on the road.⁴ Most traffic violations, such as speeding, disobeying a traffic signal (running a red light, for example), or tailgating are considered primary violations. Secondary violations, in contrast, are more minor violations. Secondary violations can only be

³ [2023- Traffic Stop Deep Dive- Final Report](#)

⁴ Specifically, a primary stop gives police officers the justification, "probable cause," or "reasonable suspicion" to pull over a driver. A traffic stop is lawful under the Fourth Amendment when there is probable cause to believe that the driver has committed a violation of the vehicle laws, *Brice v. State*, 225 Md. App. 666, 695-96 (2015) (citing *Whren*, 517 U.S. at 810), or when an officer has reasonable, articulable suspicion that "criminal activity may be afoot[.]" *Id.* (quoting *Terry v. Ohio*, 392 U.S. 1, 30 (1968)). *See also Lewis v. State*, 398 Md. 349, 362 (2007) (quoting *Delaware v. Prouse*, 440 U.S. 648, 650 (1979)) ("[A] traffic stop violates the Fourth Amendment where there is no reasonable suspicion that the car is being driven contrary to the laws governing the operation of motor vehicles or that either the car or any of its occupants is subject to seizure or detention in connection with the violation of any other applicable laws.").

investigated after a stop for a primary offense has occurred. An example of an existing secondary violation includes an item hanging from a rear-view mirror.

First, Senate Bill 55 adds non-safety-related infractions to the list of secondary violations in Maryland. Under Senate Bill 55, the following violations would be recategorized as secondary offenses:

- Driving with a registration plate expired for less than four months;
 - Displaying an expired registration;
 - Driving with only one white-light headlight;
 - Driving without an illuminated license plate;
 - Driving with one outside rearview mirror when the interior rearview mirror is obstructed;
- and
- Driving with excessive window tint.

In addition to this recategorization of offenses, the legislation requires officers to document the reasons for a traffic stop or other stop on any citation or police report resulting from the stop. If an officer fails to abide by this requirement, any evidence gathered in the stop may serve as a basis for exclusion under the exclusionary rule.

By shifting police traffic enforcement from making these types of stops to focusing on dangerous driving, jurisdictions can promote road safety and overall public safety, while advancing community trust in the police. The resources, time, and energy that go into traffic stops for non-safety reasons present a significant opportunity cost. It is far more important for the safety of our roads for our officers engaged in traffic enforcement to be focusing on dangerous behavior that can be life threatening such reckless driving, speeding, running red lights, driving under the influence, or tailgating.

Additionally, when an officer pulls over a vehicle on a roadway or highway, they are placed at-risk by vehicles traveling at high speeds that are passing by, especially when their vision is obstructed by inclement weather or lack of daylight. In 2025, two Baltimore City police officers were hospitalized after being struck by a passing vehicle while attempting to conduct a traffic stop in the early morning.⁵ In 2021, when the Maryland Chiefs of Police Association and the Maryland Sheriffs' Association opposed legislation I introduced called Know Your Rights Acts, they testified that traffic stops are “the most inherently dangerous activities in which police officers are involved.” But they can also be inherently dangerous for everyone else; especially for Black motorists.

When I introduced this bill last session, I told the committee that the legislation was “the beginning of a conversation” to address an indisputable problem of racial disparities in traffic stops. However, this bill raises important questions of how we can balance the need to reduce these police encounters with the need for safety on our roads. It has necessarily prompted a considerable and continuing conversation with law enforcement and constituents alike. And this dialogue has resulted in variety of alterations to last year’s bill.

⁵ <https://www.wbalv.com/article/baltimore-police-officers-struck-by-car-traffic-stop/63392849>

Provisions from last year's bill, including driving without a functional taillight or brake light and driving in a bus-only lane have been removed. It has also been specified that driving without an outside mirror will remain a primary offense when the interior mirror is also obstructed. Additionally, while the draft bill in front of you also includes recategorizing littering as secondary offense, I have with me an amendment to also remove that change from the bill as a result of these conversations.

In last year's hearings, law enforcement raised concerns that SB292 included language that officers could face disciplinary action for enforcing secondary offenses in the absence of a primary offense during a traffic stop and mandate that evidence gathered would be inadmissible in court. Consequently, we have elected to remove this language as well.

In conclusion, recategorizing non-safety related traffic stops— that are disproportionately enforced on Black and brown Marylanders— will enhance public safety by refocusing strained police resources on serious traffic offenses that threaten road safety and rebalancing police workload towards violent crime. Through our ongoing dialogue, we have significantly narrowed and altered this legislation from last year and have struck a strong and smart balance with equity and safety concerns. I urge a favorable report.