

January 20, 2026

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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF BILL SB55

Motor Vehicles – Police Stops – Secondary Enforcement and Excludable Evidence

TO: Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Jo Shifrin

My name is Jo Shifrin. I am a resident of Bethesda. I am submitting this testimony in support of Bill SB55, Motor Vehicles – Police Stops – Secondary Enforcement and Excludable Evidence, on behalf of Jews United for Justice.

I am a retiree who moved to Bethesda to be near my grandchildren. My faith informs my belief in how society should treat its residents. *Tzedek Tirdof*, to pursue justice, means that I must try to make the world more fair for everyone and help everyone to live a safe and healthy life.

There is ample evidence that police officers, like many members of our society, experience racial bias. As a result, Black and brown residents of our state are disproportionately stopped by police. Often, these are pretextual stops, whereby the police use non-safety related reasons to stop a car in order to conduct a search of the vehicle in the hopes that they will find illegal drugs or weapons. These stops are considered non-safety related because they are based upon expired registrations, partially obscured license plates, littering, window tint, etc. which do not affect the safety of either the passengers of the vehicle or other drivers and passengers on the road. And these stops are not effective.

In 2022, in Montgomery County, Maryland, guns were found in less than one-half of one percent of the 36,000 stops made. In Maryland, stops for equipment and registration related violations make up about 44% of all stops. However, even if the police stop cars to enforce vehicle code violations, they risk causing as much harm as the pretextual stops do. These stops increase the physical and psychological harm to members of the Black community and can contribute to distrust of law enforcement. Moreover, these stops do not increase public safety nor do they effectively fight crime. They also divert police resources from serious safety concerns.

SB55 will require that police officers document the reason for all stops. If a motorist is driving recklessly or speeding, SB55 does not prevent the police from stopping a vehicle that is potentially risking the safety of everyone on the road.

Excluding non-safety related stops will achieve a number of important things. It will reduce racial disparities in traffic stops, thus creating a sense of fairness, especially in communities of color. It will promote safety and it will reduce community trauma. It will vastly improve community and policing relations, and it will allow the police departments to deploy their officers more effectively so that they can focus on more serious crimes.

Given the fact that there are so many vacancies on police forces, it seems prudent to allocate limited police resources to the most serious crimes, including those involving motor vehicles. Rather than spending time stopping cars for a single burned out tail light, failing to illuminate a registration plate, or having dark tinted windows, wouldn't it be better for the police to focus on motorists who are speeding, driving aggressively, are obviously impaired or who are distracted while they drive?

I truly believe that SB55 will benefit Maryland residents in a variety of ways, not least of which is by increasing traffic safety, public safety, and promoting equity.

I urge the Judicial Proceedings Committee to issue a favorable report on SB55.