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Finance Committee



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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

February 4, 2026

The Honorable Will Smith, Chair
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
Maryland Senate
Annapolis, Maryland

Re: Senate Bill 349 – Vehicle Laws – Eluding Police – Penalties

Dear Chair Smith and Members of the Committee:

I respectfully submit this testimony in support of Senate Bill 349, legislation that alters the penalties for attempting to elude a police officer when that conduct results in the death of another person and reclassifies the offense as a felony.

This bill is rooted in a tragic and preventable loss. In March 2025, three-year-old Zoey Harrison was killed when a driver fleeing a police traffic stop crashed into the vehicle in which she was riding. Her death, one of multiple fatalities in a short period of time caused by individuals fleeing law enforcement, exposed a critical gap in Maryland law: when a person deliberately attempts to elude police and that decision results in the death of an innocent bystander, the offense is currently classified as a misdemeanor.

In response to Zoey's death, Prince George's County enacted Zoey's Law to reform police pursuit policies by clarifying engagement standards, strengthening oversight, and requiring transparent reporting. Senate Bill 349 complements that local reform by addressing a separate but equally important issue — accountability after a fatal outcome occurs. This bill does not regulate police conduct or pursuit decisions. Instead, it ensures that Maryland law appropriately reflects the gravity of the harm caused when flight from police results in the loss of life. Attempting to elude law enforcement is an intentional act that places the public at significant risk. Nationally and locally, fleeing drivers pose a heightened danger to pedestrians, passengers, and other motorists. When that conduct results in death, treating the offense as a misdemeanor fails to align legal consequences with the severity of the outcome and undermines the deterrent purpose of the law.

Other states have recognized this reality. For example, Florida classifies willful flight from law enforcement as a felony, with enhanced felony penalties when serious bodily injury or death occurs. Maryland's current statutory framework lags behind this standard of proportional accountability.

Senate Bill 349 addresses this gap by reclassifying attempting to elude police resulting in death as a felony, with graduated penalties that reflect both the seriousness of the conduct and the outcome. The bill preserves prosecutorial discretion, judicial discretion, and all existing procedural safeguards. It does not create a new offense or impose mandatory minimum sentences. It simply ensures that when the most severe harm occurs, the law responds accordingly.

We cannot undo the tragedies that prompted this legislation, but we can take responsible action to prevent future loss of life. Elevating this offense to a felony honors the lives of innocent victims like Zoey Harrison and reinforces Maryland's commitment to public safety and accountability.

For these reasons, I respectfully request a favorable report on Senate Bill 349.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alonzo T. Washington', with a stylized, flowing script.

Alonzo T. Washington
Maryland State Senate
District 22