

Testimony in Support of House Bill 0081

Presented by Dr. Mir Usman Ali

Maryland House of Delegates

Good afternoon, Chair and members of the committee.

My name is Dr. Mir Usman Ali, and I am an Assistant Professor of Public Policy at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. I am pleased to offer testimony in support of House Bill 0081, which seeks to reclassify non-moving traffic violations as secondary offenses. This legislation is a necessary step toward addressing the racial disparities in traffic enforcement that persist across Maryland, as demonstrated by my research on traffic stops in Baltimore County.

Between 2017 and 2024, my research team's findings on racial disparities in traffic stops in Baltimore County found that Black drivers were stopped at a rate disproportionately higher than their share of the county's population. Even as the overall rate of traffic stops declined, the racial disparity remained. More troubling, we found that the most pronounced inequities occurred *after* a stop was made: Black drivers were significantly *less* likely to receive a light penalty (i.e., a warning), while being significantly *more* likely to receive a moderate penalty (i.e., a citation), as compared to White drivers.

This legislation directly addresses a key mechanism that enables the above mentioned pattern of differential enforcement—traffic stops for title and registration-related offenses (Title 13 of the Maryland Traffic Code). Minor, non-moving violations such as an expired registration provide law enforcement with broad discretion to stop drivers. Research from a wide variety of jurisdictions across the nation such as California, North Carolina, Maryland, Tennessee, New York City, Los Angeles, and our own research in Baltimore County, shows that such stops disproportionately target Black drivers (compared to White drivers). Moreover, reductions in such stops have been found to lead to a reduction in racial disparities without sacrificing road safety. Hence, by making such violations secondary offenses, HB0081 offers the potential for mitigating the aforementioned pattern of differential enforcement by race, reducing unequal police contact by driver race, while preserving public safety in Maryland.

In conclusion, reclassifying non-moving violations as secondary offenses is a data-driven, evidence-based reform that promotes fairness without compromising road safety. I urge the committee to support HB0081 as a necessary measure to reduce racial disparities in traffic enforcement and improve trust between law enforcement and the Maryland communities they serve.

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