

## **HB81 – Safer Stops 2026**

### **Opening Statement for Judiciary Committee**

Delegate N. Scott Phillips  
10<sup>th</sup> District  
Judiciary Committee

Chair Bartlett, Vice Chair Davis, and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

I am Delegate N. Scott Phillips of the 10th Legislative District, and I am here before you today to request a favorable report on HB81 – Safer Stops 2026, a priority bill of the Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland.

HB81 is straightforward in its purpose. It reclassifies certain non-dangerous, administrative traffic violations as secondary offenses. It does not eliminate enforcement. It does not prohibit citations. It simply requires that a stop be based on a primary safety violation—speeding, reckless driving, dangerous lane changes, or other conduct that truly threatens public safety—before a vehicle is pulled over.

This year, we are guided not only by lived experience, but by Maryland-based research. Dr. Umar Usman of the University of Maryland, Baltimore County analyzed Maryland traffic stop data and found persistent racial disparities in equipment and registration stops that are not explained by public safety outcomes. His findings confirm that low-level, non-safety stops disproportionately impact Black drivers while producing minimal public safety benefit.

The data in Baltimore County reflects this pattern. Administrative stops continue to fall disproportionately on African American drivers relative to their share of the population. As the Baltimore Banner recently reported, traffic stop data continues to show disparities in enforcement patterns. These low-level stops are often justified in the name of safety, yet they rarely produce serious criminal charges. That tension is exactly what this legislation seeks to address.

Statewide, hundreds of thousands of non-moving violations are enforced through traffic stops, yet arrests result in well under 1% of cases. We must ask ourselves: are we using one of the most intrusive tools of government—an armed roadside stop—in the most efficient and equitable way?

This legislation is not radical. Virginia reclassified minor equipment violations as secondary in 2020, and roadway safety has not deteriorated. In Philadelphia, after passage of the Driving Equality Act, minor stops declined significantly, racial disparities narrowed, and traffic safety did not worsen. Research from the Vera Institute of Justice shows that focusing

traffic enforcement on dangerous driving behaviors—not administrative issues—produces better safety outcomes and reduces unnecessary escalation.

HB81 is also about the moment we are living in. As immigrant communities face heightened fear and uncertainty, we must recognize that a simple equipment stop can cascade into devastating consequences. An unnecessary stop for expired registration should not become the gateway to detention or family separation. If we are serious about due process and equal protection, we must be serious about limiting unnecessary police-citizen encounters.

Importantly, we have listened carefully to concerns raised last year. The amendments before you reflect collaboration and compromise.

First, we remove any language related to administrative discipline for officers. This bill is about enforcement policy, not punishment.

Second, we clarify that only traffic-related infractions are covered.

Third, we eliminate retroactive application to ensure clarity and fairness.

Fourth, we preserve public safety by maintaining primary enforcement for truly hazardous conduct and by clarifying that vehicles with no registration remain enforceable.

We also add a new amendment that allows an officer to initiate a stop if three separate secondary infractions are observed simultaneously. That provision ensures that patterns of noncompliance can still justify intervention, while preventing single, minor defects from triggering unnecessary stops.

This bill is measured. It is data-driven. It reflects national best practices. And it continues Maryland's effort to modernize policing in a way that strengthens both public safety and public trust.

HB81 asks a simple question: should administrative compliance be enforced through the most intrusive method available, when less intrusive and more technologically advanced tools exist?

The answer, respectfully, is no.

I urge a favorable report on HB81.

Respectfully submitted,

N. Scott Phillips