

**Testimony on House Bill 81 – Support with Amendment**

**Presbyterians for Police Transformation  
Takoma Park Presbyterian Church**

**Regarding HB 81 - Motor Vehicles - Police Stops - Secondary Enforcement**

**Submitted to the  
Maryland House Judiciary Committee**

**February 24, 2026**

Dear Honorable Chair Bartlett, Vice Chair Davis, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify. As members of the Takoma Park Presbyterian Church organized as Presbyterians for Police Transformation, we want to indicate our strong support of House Bill 81, legislation concerning motor vehicles and secondary enforcement and to encourage you to consider one important amendment, described below, to make the law more effective.

We believe this legislation will improve public safety in at least four ways:

- by prioritizing policing of dangerous driving and serious traffic offenses, thereby increasing traffic safety and removing the burden on our police officers for enforcing non-safety-related infractions;
- by reducing the extreme racial inequity in traffic stops and traffic citations;
- by improving community trust of police and the rule of law; and
- by reducing the harm and trauma of individuals and families who are targeted in pretextual traffic stops.

Our church has an active racial justice initiative which helps inform our perspective on policing issues, as does the testimony of members of our congregation who are Black and whose families have experienced mistreatment from the police, including during pretextual traffic stops. We have seen first-hand, in our own community and congregation, that people of color are at greater risk of being stopped and searched, and that low level traffic stops exacerbate that disparity. We have also heard gripping and disheartening stories from our fellow congregants of the personal and family trauma resulting from pretextual and racial-profiled traffic stops.

While we're motivated by these experiences, our advocacy for the bill is guided by the data and research which reveal that states and cities with policies like those in HB 81 decrease racial disparities in traffic enforcement, result in fewer car crashes and traffic injuries/fatalities, and have little impact on non-traffic crime. We urge you to examine the experience and data from Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Virginia where similar policies have been enacted at the state, county, or municipal level. This is a successful policy and one that is growing across the country.

We are keenly aware of the strong support within our congregation, and indeed within the state and country, for traffic enforcement to keep our roads safe for pedestrians, bicyclists, and cars. That is why we believe there is a smarter way to employ police for safety – by taking non-safety-

related traffic enforcement off their plate so that police can focus their time and resources on dangerous driving, including moving violations such as speeding, illegal turns, running red lights and stop signs, and reckless disregard for pedestrians.

Traffic stops are among the most common ways in which the public interacts with police. Traffic stop data at the national, state, county, and municipal levels show that police disproportionately stop people of color, often for pretextual reasons, and too often with devastating results. Thus, passage of this legislation would not only improve public safety but also decrease racial disparities.

The bill would helpfully expand the list of infractions that can be enforced only as secondary actions upon a stop predicated on dangerous driving violations. Broadly, this expanded list of secondary actions includes equipment issues -- such as a broken light or tinted window -- and administrative issues -- such as recently expired registration or license plate placement -- neither of which create an immediate safety risk to people inside and outside the vehicle.

According to the Office of Crime Prevention and Policy's traffic safety dashboard, in 2024 equipment and registration-related violations accounted for 52 percent of traffic stops (over 280,000 for the year), representing a significant amount of time that could be better spent dealing with dangerous driving and improving public safety.

The racial equity impact note prepared for HB 81 clearly articulates the huge racial inequity in these traffic stops and in resulting citations.

- “The disproportionality rate for Black drivers is 1.83, which means that Black drivers are nearly twice as likely to be issued a traffic citation for the specified violations as would be expected given their proportion of the State’s driving population. White and Asian drivers have disproportionality ratios of 0.54 and 0.18, respectively, which means those individuals are significantly less likely to be issued a traffic citation for violations under the bill given their respective proportions of the State’s driving population.”  
(page 5)
- “Black drivers in Maryland have a racial disparity ratio of 3.36, indicating that Black drivers are more than three times as likely as white drivers to receive a traffic citation for offenses subject to the bill. Asian drivers have a disparity ratio of 0.34, which means these individuals are much less likely to be issued a traffic citation compared to white drivers.”  
(page 5)

We concur with the finding of the racial equity impact note that “the bill would likely reduce the disproportionate and disparate outcomes that negatively impact drivers, particularly Black drivers, by eliminating the ability of law enforcement to initiate traffic stops solely for the traffic violations addressed by the bill.” (page 7)

### **Amendments**

We are disappointed that, unlike previous versions of the legislation, the bill as filed this year does not exclude evidence obtained during traffic stops made in violation of this law from being

admissible in trials and proceedings. This change removes the teeth from the proposed law, as there would no longer be any consequences from disobeying it. We urge you to consider an amendment to remedy this problem by restoring some version of the earlier language to make the law truly effective.

We would urge that any additional amendments to the bill and its proposed list of secondary actions be evidence-based and not based merely on anecdotes. As more cities, counties, and states adopt similar measures, there is a growing body of comparative law as well as outcome-based evidence to draw upon and we urge you to do just that. In addition, if the Committee considers an amendment to create an exception clause when a clear and articulable case can be made for an immediate and serious threat to safety, we urge you to keep such language narrow and precisely tailored.

In sum, we urge you to pass this legislation, with an amendment as described above. Doing so serves the cause of public safety and of racial equity.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

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