



February 20, 2026

**VOTE FAVORABLE to HB0081**

Dear Chairwoman Delegate Bartlett, Vice Chair Delegate Davis and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

On behalf of Helping Ourselves to Transform (HOTT), I write in strong support of **House Bill 0081** and Senate Bill 0055, which advance common-sense, safety-centered traffic enforcement reforms that improve accountability and reduce unnecessary police encounters.

HOTT is a Maryland-based 501(c)(3) research and social justice institute committed to advancing equity, accountability, and community safety through policy reform and trauma-informed programming. Our work centers women, youth, and justice-impacted communities across the state of Maryland.

**HB0081**/SB0055 would:

- **Require a police officer to document all reasons for a traffic stop or other stop** on any citation or police report resulting from the stop;
- **Establish that certain evidence obtained from a traffic stop or other stop** conducted in violation of specified legal provisions **may be excluded** in certain proceedings;
- **Authorize a police officer to enforce certain provisions of the Maryland Vehicle Law only as a secondary action** (meaning an officer may not initiate a stop solely for those non-safety violations, but may issue a citation after a lawful stop for a primary safety reason); and
- **Apply certain provisions of the Act retroactively.**

The bill also proposes converting six low-level, non-safety-related traffic violations from primary to secondary enforcement. These include: driving with a registration plate expired for less than four months; displaying an expired registration (only if expired less than four months); driving with only one white-light headlight; driving without an illuminated license plate; driving with one outside rearview mirror when the interior mirror is obstructed; and driving with excessive window tinting. This legislation is both practical and necessary.

**Reducing unnecessary and dangerous stops:** Traffic stops are a significant risk point for both officers and the public. Limiting stops for minor, non-safety issues reduces escalation opportunities while allowing law enforcement to focus on genuine safety threats and serious

criminal investigations. Importantly, traffic stops can also be particularly dangerous for individuals with autism spectrum disorder and other developmental differences, for whom sudden, high-stress encounters may create heightened risk.

**Improving transparency and accountability:** Requiring officers to document all reasons for a stop supports clear reporting, reduces ambiguity, and strengthens public trust. It also enables better tracking of enforcement patterns and helps ensure that stops are conducted for lawful, clearly articulated reasons.

**Addressing disparate impact on Black drivers:** Equipment and administrative stops have long been associated with disproportionate impacts on Black drivers. By shifting minor, non-safety violations to secondary enforcement and requiring documentation of all stop reasons, Maryland can take measurable steps toward more equitable enforcement and reduced discriminatory outcomes.

**Evidence-based reform with successful precedents:** Other jurisdictions that have reduced low-level traffic stops have seen improvements in equity without compromising public safety. For example, Philadelphia's reforms were associated with large reductions in non-safety stops of Black drivers while serious safety enforcement and firearm recoveries improved. Virginia's reforms similarly reduced racial disparities in enforcement. These examples reinforce that Maryland can enhance both safety and fairness through targeted enforcement reforms.

**HB0081** and SB0055 represent smart, data-driven policy. They do not eliminate accountability for traffic violations; rather, they prioritize safety, reduce unnecessary risk, promote lawful policing practices, and strengthen equity and trust.

Helping Ourselves to Transform respectfully urges a **favorable report** on **HB0081** and SB0055.

Thank you for your leadership and continued commitment to policies that strengthen safety, fairness, and community trust across Maryland.

Sincerely,

*Dr. Carmen R. Johnson/S/*

Executive Director

Helping Ourselves to Transform (HOTT)