



OFFICE OF THE STATE'S ATTORNEY FOR BALTIMORE CITY

March 4, 2026

The Honorable Sandy Bartlett
Chair, Judiciary Committee
House Office Building
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Support of HB873 - Manslaughter by Vehicle or Vessel - Increased Penalties (Jamari's Law)

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

I am writing to express my strong support for HB873, which aims to increase penalties for individuals who are convicted of vehicular manslaughter. As the Baltimore City State's Attorney and the current President of the Maryland State's Attorneys' Association, I believe this bill remedies a startling injustice that exists within Maryland law, which is essential for holding accountable the people who show no regard for the safety of our communities when they get behind the wheel.

The urgent need for this legislation has been recognized in years past when it was passed by the State Senate unanimously. Grossly negligent manslaughter by motor vehicle requires the State to prove that a defendant has engaged in conduct that is of extreme or outrageous character with reckless disregard for human life – this is conduct that truly shocks the conscience and is so far removed from the realm of ordinary civil negligence.

When viewed in light of the extreme conduct required to support a conviction, the current maximum penalty for grossly negligent manslaughter by motor vehicle – ten years – is plainly inadequate, particularly because it is considered “nonviolent” for the purposes of parole eligibility, meaning that individuals convicted of this offense become eligible for release on parole after having served only 25% of their sentence.

This bill, which is named in honor of Jamari Duckett, a teenager who was tragically killed by a drunk driver in 2022, allows prosecutors to seek appropriate penalties for these cases. The drunk driver who killed Jamari was sentenced to 10 years in prison, the maximum under current law. However, because vehicular manslaughter is considered a nonviolent crime in Maryland, the driver became eligible for parole after only two and a half years.



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That is not justice. Jamari had an incredibly bright future ahead of him, but it was cut short by another individual's severely poor judgment. This bill does not create mandatory minimum sentences but will allow judges to seek penalties that match the severity of the crime.

I would also like to reiterate that this legislation was passed unanimously by the Senate in 2024 but was unable to make it out of the House in time before the legislative session ended that year. In 2025, this bill failed to move out of committee. I urge this body not to make the same mistake three years in a row. I respectfully request a favorable report on HB873.

Sincerely,

Ivan J. Bates

Ivan J. Bates
State's Attorney for Baltimore City