



Bill 12-23, Police – Traffic Stops - Limitations The Safety and Traffic Equity in Policing (STEP) Act

April 24, 2023

Council President Glass and Council Members,

The Washington Area Bicyclist Association (WABA) supports Bill 12-23, the Safety and Traffic Equity in Policing (STEP) Act, with a request for amendment. Specifically, we ask for continued police stops for unilluminated headlights and taillights in circumstances when use is required, because of roadway safety implications for people who walk, bicycle, and roll and other vulnerable road users.

WABA is a nonprofit organization with over 700 Montgomery County members. We envision a just and sustainable transportation system where walking, biking, and transit are the best ways to get around.

We envision a just transportation system, however police traffic enforcement in Montgomery County is manifestly unjust. The County's Office of Legislative Oversight has found severe racial disparities in police traffic enforcement. The October 2022 OLO Memorandum Report 2022-12¹ notably states,

"Black drivers accounted for a higher percentage of traffic stops (30%) than the percentage of the adult population that is Black (18%)."

The OLO further reports,

"Data show that Black drivers accounted for 43% of searches and 38% of arrests during traffic stops, while Black adults account for 18% of the County's adult population. Similarly, Latinx drivers accounted for 31% of searches and 35% of arrests, while Latinx adults accounted for 19% of the County's adult population."

Traffic stops can be dangerous and deadly, with officers trained to anticipate danger and act accordingly. In Montgomery County, police use force against Black and brown people at far higher rates than white people – 80% of all use-of-force incidents in 2022 – likely placing the individuals mostly likely to be stopped at even greater risk of harm. Additionally, fines and penalties disproportionately affect and punish individuals who are struggling financially.

However a large proportion of stops do not significantly contribute to public safety.

These are the reasons WABA supports Bill 12-23, the STEP Act, which would curtail inessential police traffic stops, although again, we ask amendment to allow continued stops for unilluminated headlights and taillights in circumstances when use is required, because of roadway safety implications for vulnerable road users.

¹ https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OLO/Resources/Files/2022_reports/OLOReport2022-12.pdf

Further, we believe that rather than stopping drivers for non-safety related violations, the County should focus on effective and equitable steps to boost safety including redesigning roadways and accelerating adoption of automated enforcement.

We look forward to Bill 12-23's enactment with amendment and thank you for the opportunity to testify.

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