

GOCA Testimony to County Council on Bill 12-23

4/25/23 on Zoom

Good evening. I am Helene Rosenheim. I am here on behalf of the officers of the Greater Olney Civic Association, a nonprofit, umbrella organization of civic and homeowners' associations in the greater Olney area.

First, I want to affirm that the Greater Olney Civic Association strongly agrees with the premise of the problem that this Bill is attempting to solve, namely that 'traffic stops at times, may result in harsher consequences than the stops warrant and they are disproportionately carried out against people of color'. We also agree that the Council, the police, and the community have a duty to come up with viable solutions to end this problem. But unfortunately, we don't think that Bill 12-23 does that. The bill cites other jurisdictions throughout the country that have either changed or are studying ways to alter traffic enforcement. But we are not given any data on the results of those changes. In fact, we understand that one of the cited laws in Philadelphia that went into effect in March 2022 is already being challenged in the courts.

Our main concern is that Bill 12-23 is putting forward solutions that are untested and could have unintended adverse side effects. Although most of the violations that would be prohibited by this bill seem minor, there are good reasons they are still violations. CDC lists Accidents as the 5th leading cause of death in Maryland in 2021, right below COVID19 and Strokes. We are used to cars as a means to get us from point a to point b, but there is a reason we get licensed and registered to drive them, so removing the enforcement of this law in particular is a big concern.

A lack of enforcement of other violations under Title 22 which deals with improper car equipment would also endanger people. For example, tinted windows can have a negative impact on pedestrians crossing the street. You know what I mean if you've ever tried to cross the street when a car is halfway through the crosswalk and you're not sure if they're fully stopped or rolling through. Being able to see the driver's eyes can mean the difference between being hit by a car and crossing the street safely.

The police should also have the authority to stop a person for crossing against a walk signal or crosswalk. This can be dangerous for motorists on Routes 97 and 108 in Olney, especially in the evening.

We support the proposed change that would require the police to collect regular analysis of traffic stop data, report it to the Council, and publish it on its website. This data should be a starting point to any conversation about how to make our roads safer. The only way to promote fairness and reduce racial disparities in the interaction between police and people of color is to come up with solutions by looking at and analyzing the core of the problem. If we want a cure for a cancer, we don't stop screening for it, which this bill would be equivalent to, but we put in the work to find the correct mixture of drugs that would stop it from getting worse.

*<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/states/maryland/md.htm>

* <https://casetext.com/statute/code-of-maryland/article-transportation/title-22-vehicle-laws-equipment-of-vehicles>