

April 25, 2023

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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF BILL 12-23
The STEP Act to Ban Minor Traffic Stops in Montgomery County

TO: Council President Glass, Vice President Friedson, and members of the County Council

FROM: Carol Stern

As a resident of District 1 in Chevy Chase, I am submitting this testimony in support of Bill 12-23, the Safety and Traffic Equity in Policing (STEP) Act.

I want to thank CM Jawando for sponsoring this bill and CM Mink for co-sponsor it. As a member of Adat Shalom Reconstructionist Congregation, I advocate with my Jewish values for changes in our laws in Montgomery County and Maryland.

The biblical commentator Rashi, writing in the 11th century, noted when judges (shoftim) rendered a legal decision, it was the police (shotrim) who were charged with enforcing that law even by using physical force. However, throughout the literature of the Jewish sages, attention has been given to the conduct, the decency and the character of both institutions.

Both judges and police are expected to comport themselves in keeping with the highest standards of Jewish law and ethical teaching. Further, in the Torah, we find instruction that the law should be applied equally and fairly to all, regardless of social status or origins. When we are working to reform our criminal justice system, we must demand that it operates in accordance with these deeply held Jewish beliefs.

Racial disparities in traffic stops are a long-standing problem in our County. Over 20 years ago, the NAACP filed a complaint with the US Department of Justice alleging that the Montgomery County Police Department (MCPD) engaged in discriminatory traffic enforcement. That complaint led to a memorandum of agreement that ordered MCPD to collect and report data so that their discriminatory practices could be tracked.

According to a recent report by the County Council's Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO), disparities in traffic enforcement persist and have even worsened in recent years! From 2018 - 2022, **Black and Latinx drivers were stopped, cited, searched and arrested at rates far exceeding their representation in our population, while White and Asian drivers were stopped at rates far below their population numbers:**

The STEP Act Will Increase Traffic Safety And Promote Equity; This is Why Jurisdictions and National Justice Reform Organizations are Supporting and Passing Similar Laws and Policies. I urge the County Council to support the STEP Act, Bill 12-23.