

Testimony for Montgomery County Council Bill 12-23, Police - Traffic Stops - Limitations (The STEP Act)

SUPPORT

Dear Members of the County Council,

My name is Clarky Carnegie, and I am a 21-year-old black man, Cameroonian immigrant, and Montgomery College student, and I live in White Oak. I am here today to speak in support of the STEP Act, a bill that would ban minor traffic stops in Montgomery County.

I have had multiple negative encounters with the police, even though I was not doing anything wrong. I have friends who have been pulled over for minor traffic stops in Montgomery County and in DC, and I have personally experienced the fear and anxiety that comes with being pulled over by the police.

Late last Summer, I was driving working for Doordash when I was pulled over by police in Washington, D.C.- Silver Spring area. I was at a red light, when one undercover police car came from behind then stopped right in front of me, then two police cars pulled up on each side of my car and one police car pulled up at the back. Then one police officer came up to my car and asked for my license and registration immediately. I asked him why, but he didn't give me an answer and then two more police officers came up to my car window. One started flashing a flashlight in my car as I gave the other officer my license and registration before he left to run my registration on his computer. Then two more police officers, in addition to the ones flashing lights in my car, came up and started asking me questions about "Do you have drugs? Do you have guns? Have you drank? Have you smoked today? Why are your eyes red?"

That's when I explained to them that I was tired because I do deliveries and I had been working all day. One of the police officers then asked me what was in my glove compartment and what was in the fanny pack I was wearing on my chest. I didn't understand why he was asking me all these questions. I could easily ask him what's in his pocket. But the officer just kept insisting can

he just see what's in my bag. When I told him there was nothing in my bag, he just became more insistent.

In the meantime as he was talking, the officer that went to run my license and registration came back and signaled that he didn't find anything on my license of registration and that I was clear. Even after that, the other officer still insisted to see what was in my bag. I finally said "if it gives you peace of mind, I'll show you what's in my bag." I opened it and just showed it to him. There were my house keys, chapstick and my wallet. Finally, that officer and most of the others started leaving. The only person that stayed was the officer with my information. He gave my license back to me and that's when he told me: my back light was broken and that's why he pulled me over. Then he said he saw that I lived in White Oak and asked me what I was doing far from home. Again, I told him— it doesn't matter what I'm doing far from home. Like I said, I do deliveries and when you do deliveries they can send you anywhere. Then he just said okay and left.

After this experience. I just realized. Wow. The things that you see on T.V. can actually happen to you. That was around the same time that a lot of people were being killed during police stops. If I had had even an ounce of weed on me, they probably would've pulled me out of the car and it could've been even worse. I think what saved me is that I don't smoke. So part of me was just grateful that I didn't end up dead. But I was also annoyed because this should not have happened in the first place. I shouldn't have to be grateful for being alive when I was just minding my own business. I was just there bamboozled thinking—this did not just happened to me. But it actually did.

This experience was traumatizing and humiliating. It made me feel like I was being targeted and that I had done something wrong even though I was just trying to do my job. I know that I am not alone in experiencing these kinds of encounters with the police. Many black people, especially young black men, have been pulled over and harassed by the police for no reason.

The STEP Act would help prevent these kinds of encounters from happening by banning minor traffic stops in Montgomery County. This is an important step in building trust between the

police and the black community. It would show that the County Council is serious about addressing issues of racial profiling and police brutality.

I urge you to support the STEP Act and help make Montgomery County a safer and more just place for all of its residents.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Clarky Carnegie