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

### **SUPPORT, WITH AMENDMENT**

Dear Honorable Council Members,

We are writing on behalf of the members of Young People for Progress to express our strong support for the STEP Act, and ask that the Council pass the STEP Act with an amendment to strengthen the consent search provision.

Young People for Progress (YPP) is a member-based civic and social justice organization of youth and young adults under 35 years old in Montgomery County. As an organization that comprises many members who are young people of color, we know firsthand as well as from our peers that minor traffic stops can cause physical harm to drivers, and can also cause fear, anxiety, and stress. Additionally, these stops can be financially burdensome, particularly for those who are already struggling to make ends meet, and can cause people further issues with the legal system. For some of our members and classmates, minor traffic stops and tickets they received in Montgomery County have led to being written up at work for tardiness, to arrest for unpaid tickets, and even job loss. Please know that for every testimony or story that is shared by someone who has been subject to traffic stops by police, there are at least a dozen more stories from young people and people of color who are not testifying.

In fact, in late 2019 and early 2020, members of Young People for Progress conducted a project in which they anonymously interviewed their peers at county GED and workforce development programs, at Montgomery College, and in the community. The results were eye-opening - many young people had very negative experiences with the police during traffic stops and otherwise. However, they would not file complaints or contact their local officials about those encounters because they believed nothing would actually happen, nothing would actually change, and they did not want to become targets or face retaliation for complaining about negative police encounters.

The reality is that the vast majority of people do not say anything out of a belief that nothing will change and out of fear of retaliation and becoming a target. And anyone testifying about their negative experiences during police traffic stops is showing extreme courage and sense of civic duty in talking about their experiences in order to make the county better.

Now we are asking you to listen to us and to act by passing this bill.

There are some that will tell you not to act because they are worried that prohibiting these harmful stops could jeopardize traffic safety, but the research shows that is just not true. The research is substantial that minor traffic stops do not significantly improve traffic safety. In fact, 2021 Research published in the Journal of Trauma and Acute Care Surgery, analyzed traffic stop data from 33 state patrol divisions across the country, found no correlation between higher rates of traffic stops and lower rates of motor vehicle crash deaths. This is corroborated by Montgomery County's Vision Zero [research](#), which explains that the 'big five' violations that contribute most to lack of traffic safety, (which are (1) not wearing seat belts, (2) speeding and aggressive driving, (3) not yielding right of way, (4) impaired driving, and (5) distracted driving) are not violations that are most subject to minor traffic stops.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, research by the Connecticut Racial Profiling Prohibition Advisory Board found that even the equipment violations that most often cause crashes, which are—brake, steering, power train, and tire issues—are not the equipment violations subject to minor traffic stops.<sup>2</sup>

Yet still others will tell you not to act to address these harmful minor traffic stops because they will say they are necessary for gun recovery, but representatives from the Montgomery County Police themselves shared in a County Council Public Safety Committee [meeting](#) this February that from the 35,000 traffic stops county police made last year, only 172 firearms were seized.<sup>3</sup>

What we can prove through overwhelming data and research, and through the stories of those who have been subject to traffic stops in Montgomery County is that these minor traffic stops are harming us. This much is clear. These stops are putting us in situations of stress, anxiety, and terror. They are causing us fines that we cannot afford and creating more problems for us within the legal system. We ask that you pass the STEP Act, to limit these harmful traffic stops. Please believe us and the people who have been brave enough to come forward. And show us you care enough to act.

Thank you,

Danielle Blocker, Executive Director  
Omodamola Williams, Co-President  
Christopher Knight, Co-President  
Eleanor Smedberg, Vice President  
Amyra Hasan, Secretary  
Folahan Akinyemi, Treasurer  
Young People for Progress

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<sup>1</sup> Vision Zero FY22 Annual Report, Montgomery County Department of Transportation. (2022, November 1). [https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/visionzero/Resources/Files/Vision\\_Zero\\_Annual\\_Report\\_FY22.pdf](https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/visionzero/Resources/Files/Vision_Zero_Annual_Report_FY22.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Letter to the Logistics Subcommittee, Police Transparency and Accountability Task Force from Connecticut Racial Profiling Prohibition Advisory Board. (2021, February 4). RE: Evaluation and recommendations of a primary and secondary traffic enforcement system. [https://www.cga.ct.gov/jud/tfs/20200116\\_Police%20Transparency%20and%20Accountability%20Task%20Force/Related%20Materials/Primary%20vs.%20Secondary%20Offense%20System%20Merits.pdf](https://www.cga.ct.gov/jud/tfs/20200116_Police%20Transparency%20and%20Accountability%20Task%20Force/Related%20Materials/Primary%20vs.%20Secondary%20Offense%20System%20Merits.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Discussion: OLO Memorandum Report 2022-21: Analysis of Date Montgomery County Traffic Violations Dataset, Montgomery County Council Transportation & Environment/Public Safety Committees. (2023, February 6). [https://www.youtube.com/live/y0d\\_5\\_FhGxo](https://www.youtube.com/live/y0d_5_FhGxo)

