

**Presbyterians for Police Transformation  
Takoma Park Presbyterian Church**

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF BILL 12-23  
THE SAFETY AND TRAFFIC EQUITY IN POLICING (STEP) ACT  
April 25, 2023**

Good evening. My name is Ferd Hoefner and I am here tonight representing the police reform committee of the Takoma Park Presbyterian Church in strong support of the STEP Act. Presbyterians for Police Transformation has been an active advocate for police reform for the past four years at the state, county, and municipal levels.

Our church also has an active racial justice initiative which helps inform our perspective on policing issues, as does the testimony of members of our congregation who are Black and whose families have experienced mistreatment from the police, including during pretextual traffic stops. We have seen first-hand, in our own community and congregation, that people of color are at greater risk of being stopped and searched, and that low level traffic stops exacerbate that disparity.

Traffic stops are the most common way in which the public interacts with police. Studies of traffic stop data show that police disproportionately stop people of color, often for pretextual reasons, and too often with devastating results. Racial disparities in traffic stops persist in Montgomery County as demonstrated by the recent reports of the Office of Legislative Oversight. We agree with the County's Reimagining Public Safety Task Force that pretextual stops for minor offenses need to be eliminated and thus we are pleased to speak in support of the STEP Act.

We applaud Councilmembers Jawando and Mink for introducing this bill. In our view, it would improve public safety in at least three ways: by prioritizing policing of dangerous driving and serious traffic offenses, thereby increasing traffic safety; by improving community trust of police and the rule of law; and by reducing the harm and trauma of individuals and families who are targeted in pretextual traffic stops.

I will not take the time to talk about all the details of the bill, but instead will highlight two brief points:

First, the bill includes a detailed and specific list of limitations on traffic stops. We are sure there will be much discussion of the particulars and we would simply urge that if there are amendments to the bill as the legislative process continues, that any such changes be evidence-based and not based on anecdotes. As more cities, counties, and states adopt similar measures, there is a growing body of comparative law as well as outcome-based evidence to draw upon.

Second, as the bill moves forward, please retain its data collection and reporting requirements, and do not weaken them. Without these provisions there is no transparency or public accountability.

In sum, we urge you to pass this legislation. Details of course can and will be debated, but this is an issue that cannot be ignored. So, amend the bill if there is good cause and good data and evidence to back any changes, but pass a strong bill that will end pretextual stops and bring our County into alignment with many other jurisdictions that have enacted similar laws. Doing so serves the cause of public safety and of racial equity.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.