

AGAINST

Montgomery County Councilmembers,

By passing the STEP Act, the Council will worsen gun violence and exacerbate drug abuse for the mere appearance of acting on something politically trendy.

Mere weeks after the Council began deliberations to create a new police district to address surging gun crime, I'm shocked to see the Council consider a provision to disarm our police of their capacity to lawfully stop cars.

You claim this bill is to reduce racial disparities in traffic stops, as if it's easy for a police officer to glean a motorist's race while in view of a tag affixed to their rear license plate.

Ignoring such practicalities, you cite data purporting to show racial bias in traffic stops and chalk up irregularities as simply racial prejudice.

However, supposing that one racial group may be more likely to drive with an expired tag is like saying that a healthcare or wealth gap exists between races in our county. Like wealth, educational achievement, or medical gap, myriad factors may lead one demographic to comply with the MVA's requirements more than others, easily explaining disparities in traffic stops.

Perhaps, for example, one group of motorists tend to have more trouble finding time off work, have greater difficulty making an MVA appointment, and thus tend to drive with expired tags more frequently?

The alternative is to assume that all County demographic groups drive with expired tags at the same proportion and that County Police simply ignore one group over another.

Aside from its obvious illogic, the true problem with this bill are unintended effects on gun violence. Stories abound in the media about the prevalence in illegal guns, drug abuse, and organized retail crime (often facilitated with stolen registration plates), all of which are commonly fought during a lawful traffic stop.

I also urge the Council to consider the implicit messaging of the STEP Act. This policy would advertise a Council that distrusts its police so much that they don't trust them to identify out-of-date registration tags.

If you're a criminal seeking to illegally traffic guns in our County, how empowering would that feel? Worse, if you're a County Police officer hoping to intercept these guns, how must it feel to know policymakers have tied your hands?

Should you make the mistake of passing this bill, years from now the Council will be right back here with nothing to show for it except having willfully exacerbated our embarrassing if not terrifying crime problem.