

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: Heidi Rhodes

My name is Heidi Rhodes. I am a resident of Colesville in District 5. On behalf of Jews United for Justice (JUFJ), I am submitting this testimony in support of Bill 12-23, the Safety and Traffic Equity in Policing (STEP) Act. JUFJ organizes over 2,000 Jews and allies from across Montgomery County, who act on our shared values to advance social and economic justice and racial equity in our local community.

Thank you to Councilmembers Jawando and Mink for sponsoring this bill. I am a co-leader of Oseh Shalom Synagogue's social justice committee and am a volunteer leader for JUFJ. While I have not experienced a negative traffic stop, I am compelled by the Jewish values of *rachmanut* — empathy and compassion — to join those who have been directly impacted by unjust traffic stops to speak out in support of the STEP Act. Removing police from the low-level traffic stops covered by the STEP Act shows compassion to people whose lives are disrupted both financially and legally through unnecessary entanglement with police and the legal system, and improves public safety by allowing the police to focus on more serious crimes.

Current police practices of traffic enforcement disproportionately target and harm Black and brown communities. According to the most recent Office of Legislative Oversight ([OLO](#)) [report](#), historic disparities in traffic enforcement have not only persisted but worsened and, in turn, compounded existing racial and economic disparities and eroded community trust in the police and the rule of law. Furthermore, data has proven that low-level traffic stops do little to nothing to protect our communities from gun violence and the opioid crisis. Traffic enforcement should be for traffic safety, not for enabling police to conduct unconstitutional investigations and perpetuate racial inequities.

By passing the STEP Act, Montgomery County will join jurisdictions around the country that are embracing this common-sense approach to equity and safety. States such as Virginia and Oregon and cities from San Francisco to Philadelphia, from Seattle to Memphis, as well as several police departments in Connecticut, have all passed laws or enacted policies similar to the STEP Act. [Multiple studies](#) and reviews of traffic safety and crime rates reveal that deprioritizing low-level traffic stops and prohibiting consent searches — which has

overwhelming bipartisan support, according to [new polling from Safer Cities and Data for Progress](#) — promote traffic safety and have no effect on crime. Finally, the most recent data about [road fatalities in Maryland](#) show that the persistent causes were speeding and aggressive driving, drug and alcohol impairment, distracted driving, and the failure to use seat belts. This bill would free up and empower police to focus on enforcement of these dangerous activities.

Transforming public safety in our county is a community-wide effort, and the STEP Act is one important tool to address long-standing racial inequities and protect our communities from harm. **I urge the County Council to support the STEP Act, Bill 12-23.**