

Jo Shifrin_Bill # 12-23_Support

April 25, 2023

Jo Shifrin

Bethesda, MD 20817

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: Jo Shifrin

My name is Jo Shifrin. I am a resident of Bethesda in County District I. I am submitting this testimony in support of Bill 12-23, the Safety and Traffic Equity in Policing (STEP) Act.

I am a retiree who moved to Bethesda to be near my grandchildren. My faith informs my belief in how society should treat its residents. *Tzedek Tirdof*, pursue justice, means that I must try to make the world more fair and help everyone get what they need to live a safe and healthy life.

Limiting traffic stops will achieve a number of important things. It will reduce racial disparities in traffic stops, thus creating a sense of fairness, especially in communities of color. It will promote safety and it will reduce community trauma. It will vastly improve community and policing relations, and it will further the County's Vision Zero goals. Additionally, it will allow the Montgomery County Police Department to deploy their officers more effectively so that they can focus on more serious crimes.

It is well documented that traffic stops can be dangerous. Officers are trained to anticipate danger and they act accordingly. Systemic racism in our society has created a disparity in the way people of color are seen and treated. In 2022 in Montgomery County, 80% of all use of force incidents involved people of color. Race based disparities in traffic stops erode confidence and trust in the police.

Given the fact that there are so many vacancies on the police force, it seems more prudent to allocate our limited police resources to the most serious crimes, including those involving motor vehicles. Rather than spending time stopping cars for a single burned out tail light, a cracked windshield, or a noisy muffler, the police should focus on motorists who are speeding, driving aggressively, are obviously impaired or who are distracted while they drive.

In 2022, there were 48 fatalities involving motor vehicles in Montgomery County according to the Zero Deaths Maryland website. I know that members of the Montgomery County Police Department are concerned that a reduction in traffic stops will result in fewer guns and/or drugs taken off the streets. But guns were found in less than one-half of one percent of the stops in 2022 out of a total of about 36,000 traffic stops.

I truly believe that the STEP Act will benefit Montgomery County in a variety of ways, not least of which is by increasing traffic safety, public safety, and promoting equity.

I urge the County Council to support the STEP Act, Bill #12-23.