

April 23, 2023

Karen Caplan  
Silver Spring, MD 20902

**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:** Karen Caplan

**My name is Karen Caplan. I am a resident of Silver Spring in District 6. I am submitting this testimony in support of Bill 12-23, the Safety and Traffic Equity in Policing (STEP) Act.**

Thank you so much to Councilmembers Jawando and Mink for introducing this bill. For the second time this year, I am strenuously advocating for limiting the role of the police and for reducing unnecessary police contact with the public. During the General Assembly session, I worked to support HB 1071, which bars police from stopping and searching based solely on the odor of cannabis. The passage of this bill should signal to the Council that our state legislators are taking the problem of equity in policing seriously; this Council should do the same.

As I said when advocating for HB 1071, one thing that prompts me to support the STEP Act is that I don't have a personal story. As a white college professor, I can afford to keep my vehicle registration current and to make necessary repairs for my car without delays. The infractions the bill seeks to disallow vehicle stops for are, frankly, infractions that derive from being poor, or at least poorer than I am. Pulling someone over and fining them for these things only compounds the problem. And perhaps more importantly, I can comfortably assume that I will not be pulled over as a pretext to search my car; if I *am* pulled over, I don't expect the encounter to be traumatic, to turn violent, or to send me into a criminal justice system that is stacked against me. But the unassailable truth is that many of our neighbors in Montgomery County don't have the luxury of feeling that safe. There are huge racial disparities in traffic enforcement everywhere; in Montgomery County, the Council now has a chance to help turn this around and make our community a better place for *everyone*.

I believe this bill is one of the most important things the Council can do right now for our county and our community. It acknowledges inequity and takes concrete steps to combat it. I urge the County Council to support the STEP Act, Bill 12-23.