

Testimony for Montgomery County Council Bill 12-23, Police - Traffic Stops - Limitations (The STEP Act)

May 3, 2023

Dear members of the Montgomery County Council,

On behalf of the Vision Zero Network, we are pleased to share our support for the passage of Bill 12-23, The STEP Act, with a request for amendment. Specifically, we echo the request of the Washington Area Bicycle Association (WABA) for continued enforcement of unilluminated headlights and taillights in circumstances when use is required, because of roadway safety implications, particularly for greater visibility for people walking, biking, and rolling and other vulnerable road users.

Vision Zero Network is a collaborative, nonprofit campaign helping communities across the nation set and reach the goal of Vision Zero — eliminating traffic fatalities and severe injuries among all road users — while increasing safe, healthy, equitable mobility.

We believe the passage of The STEP Act can help Montgomery County uplift more effective and equitable roadway safety strategies. The bill takes steps to reduce harmful racial disparities in local traffic enforcement and to focus roadway safety efforts on the most dangerous behaviors and situations – those which will benefit public safety most.

We have nationwide problems of both unjust, racialized traffic enforcement patterns *and* a crisis of rising traffic deaths and severe injuries, disproportionately affecting people of color and people in low-income communities.

Many communities across the nation are assessing roadway safety strategies from both efficacy and equity perspectives; and many are recognizing that the status quo approach is not serving community members well. Rather than continuing to lean on police stops of low-level, non-dangerous behaviors, which disproportionately affect people of color, we *can* uplift strategies that more effectively keep people safe as they move about *and* which help to address the problems of racialized enforcement. This includes *upstream* efforts that help prevent crashes in the first place, such as improving roadway designs to encourage safe behaviors; investing in Complete Streets, especially for the most vulnerable road users; slowing speeds to lessen crash impacts and severity; and others.

(*contd.*)

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For many reasons – including efficacy, equity practicality, and budgetary concerns – enforcement efforts should be limited and focused only on the most dangerous roadway behaviors – such as speeding and drunk driving – and should be thoughtfully developed and monitored to prevent bias.

As described by the Center For Policing Equity in its [2022 white paper](#), based on research: *“Pretextual stops do not improve traffic safety... Pretextual stops are also unlikely to prevent serious crime: Stops that are not based on any concrete evidence of serious criminal activity are unlikely to be efficient or productive uses of investigative resources.”*

By adopting a more thoughtful, tailored approach, the STEP Act represents a step forward in efforts to make mobility more safe and equitable for all. Montgomery County has an opportunity to set an example for other communities by becoming a leader in prioritizing effective *and* equitable roadway safety strategies as part of its Vision Zero commitment.

We appreciate the opportunity to share our thoughts and encourage the Council to vote to pass the STEP Act, with the amendment regarding unilluminated headlights and taillights in circumstances when use is required, as referenced prior.

We commend your leadership and attention to this issue. And we are happy to answer any questions or share more information. I can be reached at leah@visionzeronetwork.org

Sincerely,



Leah Shahum
Executive Director, [Vision Zero Network](#)