

April 24, 2023

Melissa Coretz Goemann
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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: Melissa Coretz Goemann

My name is Melissa Coretz Goemann. I am a resident of Silver Spring in District 5. **I am submitting this testimony in support of Bill 12-23, the Safety and Traffic Equity in Policing (STEP) Act.**

Thank you to Councilmember Jawando for sponsoring this bill and Councilmember Mink for co-sponsoring this bill. I am a member of Adat Shalom Reconstructionist Synagogue in Bethesda. I care about this bill because it is a matter of racial equity and the Torah teaches us that every human being is created in the image of God; therefore racism and discrimination are forbidden. We also have a moral imperative to pursue justice.

Unfortunately, our current traffic laws are often enforced in an unjust way that harms Black and Brown drivers. OLO Report 2021-10 reported that “[s]tudies show that Black and Latino drivers are stopped and searched during traffic stops for lower-level traffic violations at disproportionately higher rates compared to White drivers.”¹ Recently, OLO Memorandum Report 2022-12 found that racial disparities in traffic stops locally persisted or worsened between FY18 and FY22.² Based on this research and additional resource materials, Montgomery County’s Office of Legislative Oversight stated in their Racial Equity and Social Justice Impact Statement (RESJ) on this bill that it would have a moderate to large positive impact on racial equity and social justice (RESJ) in the County. As stated in the RESJ:

“Bill 12-23 would disproportionately benefit Black and Latinx drivers through limiting police stops for traffic offenses with the racial disparities and consensual searches. The Bill aligns with best practices for reducing racial disparities in police stops, which could improve health and other outcomes among Black, Indigenous, and Other People of Color (BIPOC) constituents.”³

Anyone who has been stopped by law enforcement knows how incredibly stressful the interaction can be. I was stopped several years ago on the highway because I had put my

¹ Leslie Rubin and Blaise DeFazio, OLO Report 2021-10, Office of Legislative Oversight, July 27, 2021. https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OLO/Resources/Files/2021_Reports/OLORReport21-10.pdf.

² Natalia Carrizosa, OLO Memorandum Report 2022-12, Office of Legislative Oversight, October 25, 2022. https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OLO/Resources/Files/2022_reports/OLORReport2022-12.pdf.

³ Janmarie Peña, Montgomery County Office of Legislative Oversight, “Racial Equity and Social Justice Impact Statement Bill 12-23: Police - Traffic Stops - Limitations (The STEP Act),” April 17, 2023, <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OLO/Resources/Files/resjis/2023/Bill12-23.pdf>.

registration sticker in the wrong place. Not only was it frightening to have to pull over on the highway, but the interaction with the officer was intimidating and stressful. I must have appeared anxious because he asked me if anything was wrong and I told him that he was causing me stress. The interaction was brief but I was left rattled and still remember it. I am a white woman and have not been stopped by an officer since then. It's hard to imagine the trauma and fear that Black and Brown people must constantly live with as they are stopped by law enforcement so much more frequently.

This bill would help to reduce these unnecessary police encounters for traffic infractions and, in doing so, would reduce trauma to Black and Brown people in the community and lead to improved community- police relations. **I urge the County Council to support the STEP Act, Bill 12-23.**

Respectfully Submitted,

Melissa Coretz Goemann