



Testimony in Support of the Safety and Traffic Equity in Policing (STEP) Act – Bill 12-23

Good evening members of the County Council and fellow community members. My name is Michael Rubin, a resident of Takoma Park and a resident of Montgomery County for over 40 years of my life. I am here this evening representing IMPACT Silver Spring, an organization working for racial equity in this county and a proud organizational member of the Silver Spring Justice Coalition. We encourage your complete support of the Safety and Traffic Equity in Policing Act, otherwise known as the STEP Act. This act is an important step toward making policing in our county more equitable.

In preparing these remarks, I reviewed some testimony I gave over 4 years ago where I described the discriminatory practices of the Montgomery County Police Department in traffic stops of black and brown drivers in comparison to their white co-residents. Since that time this Council has passed the Racial Equity and Social Justice Act in late 2019 by a 9-0 vote, including 5 of you still serving on this Council. Imagine my dismay in reviewing current statistics of racial disparities in traffic enforcement and seeing that over 3 years later, nothing has changed. This is entirely unacceptable. Those of you who have served on this Council during that period should also find this unacceptable. If that 9-0 vote for the Racial Equity and Social Justice Act means anything, then you should feel compelled to review the Racial Equity Impact Assessments prepared by the Office of Legislative Oversight and take them to heart when grappling with all bills such as the STEP Act.

It is not surprising that the Racial Equity Impact Assessment for the STEP Act found that it would have a moderate to large impact on increasing equity in our community. That alone should garner your support for bill 12-23. Overlay that with all the strong testimony that you have received about this bill from SSJC, Young People for Progress and other advocates who know that fewer police interactions with community increase public safety and build trust in our police force. This is what Takoma Park Police Chief Tony DeVaul told me and the rest of the Takoma Park Reimagining Public Safety Task Force almost 2 years ago when speaking about the need to reduce low level traffic enforcement in Takoma Park. He was quite persuasive and I encourage the MCPD and yourselves to listen to those words of wisdom.

The STEP Act should be a no-brainer for all of those reasons. Let me give you one more. I hear a lot about the large number of vacancies in the MCPD and the high levels of overtime that are a consequence of these vacancies. If we reduce the scope of duties of officers by removing low level enforcement of traffic offences, the MCPD should be able to operate with fewer officers and less overtime. In these challenging budget times, I would hope that this is a consideration as well.

I close with imploring you to have the courage and humanity to actually take on fixing what is clearly broken and to pass this bill with no weakening amendments so that we can work toward building a Montgomery County where all residents feel safe. I look forward to the day when all residents of this community can wake up, go about their days, and be confident that they will have no unpleasant interactions with a police officer. Thank you.

Michael Rubin
Interim Executive Director, IMPACT Silver Spring