

April 25, 2023

Nicole Kaplan
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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: Nicole Kaplan

My name is Nicole Kaplan; 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 Council Members Will Jawando and Kristin Mink for sponsoring this very powerful and important piece of legislation. Montgomery County has the opportunity to be leaders in the fight for racial justice and public safety with bills like this one. Unfounded stops/frisks have longtime been the cause of disparity and harm to citizens, especially our Black and Brown community members. It needs to stop.

Just today, I heard yet another example of how harmful *assumptions*, not facts, have on my Black neighbors. A thoughtless parent volunteer on a school field trip this weekend went up to a Black man who she didn't recognize and demanded he leave the room their students were in. It didn't even cross her mind that he was a parent volunteer, like herself. She could not make the positive assumption that he had made the same choice as her to accompany his child. He was embarrassed, angered, harmed. This happens on a daily basis in the way police routinely force cars to pull over minor traffic infringements.

Any situation with police makes this already harmful assumption-making infinitely worse. It is well documented that traffic stops can be dangerous and deadly, with officers trained to anticipate danger and act accordingly. In Montgomery County, police use force against Black and brown people at far higher rates than White people (80% of all use-of-force incidents in 2022!), placing them at even greater risk of harm. The STEP Act makes our community safer by allowing police to focus on dangerous driving, instead of minor violations unrelated to safety. By passing the STEP Act, Montgomery County will join jurisdictions around the country that are embracing this common-sense approach to equity and safety. I'm tired of seeing Black community members unjustly assumed as having committed crimes.

Let's join other leaders in our country and pass the STEP Act and in doing so increase traffic safety and promote equality. **I urge the County Council to support the STEP Act, Bill 12-23.**