

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

SUPPORT

Dear Honorable Council Members,

My name is Omodamola Eric Williams, and I am here today to express my strong support for the STEP Act, which would address minor traffic stops that harmed me and my family. I live in Gaithersburg, and have lived in Montgomery County for 10 years coming from Prince George's County. I work for the Montgomery County Racial Equity Network and am a member of Young People for Progress. I am a proud father of two little girls at MCPS and I constantly worry about our safety from police stops when we commute everyday in my city.

I myself have been followed by police while driving and have been pulled over in Montgomery County multiple times for minor infractions including expired plates, a broken taillight, and driving with earphones in my ear. Each time, the police officers who pulled me over treated me with suspicion and hostility, and often used the minor infraction as an excuse to search my car and question me about my activities.

The worst time I was pulled over was when I was at my lowest but still working at UPS while living in my fathers minivan. During that time my father was sick in long term care in the hospital while I was trying to make way to get back on my feet and pay our debts off. One day I was stopped by Traffic police for having expired tags which I couldn't afford at the time to pay off. During that stop, the police saw that my registration was dead and searched my van. All they saw was interview clothes, toothbrush, resume, pillow etc. The cop realized that I'm living in my van and asked why don't I just go to the shelter. I told them the shelters are full and that I worked odd hours at UPS. He proceeded to write me tickets anyway and told me to get rid of the vehicle or pay my MVA fees to properly register it. Months later I never got my court notice so I went to

the courthouse clerk what's going on who told me there's a warrant for my arrest for failure to appear and that I need to see the commissioners to reschedule the court date. Upon going there, I explained to the commissioner how I didn't know the court dates go to the address of the DL and not the P.O box I had. So the commissioner went ahead and had me sent to jail until my next court date. That was the worst, most traumatizing experience I ever underwent. I was in jail for basically being poor and homeless. My third day in jail, I eventually saw a lawyer and was released until my next court date. I lost my job, my dignity, and developed PTSD. Only for everything to be thrown out and the case dismissed. Even though that was years ago, it still haunts me. So when I'm driving, I avoid police to the point of purposely missing my exit/turn on the roads and highways. I don't want no one else to endure what I had to. I know that I am not alone in this, as many people in our community have also experienced the trauma and anxiety that comes with being pulled over by the police for no good reason.

By passing the STEP Act, you would be taking an important step towards ending this harmful and discriminatory practice. By eliminating minor traffic stops, you would be promoting safety and justice for all, and helping to build trust between law enforcement and communities of color.

I urge you to support this important piece of legislation and make Montgomery County a leader in promoting equity and fairness in our justice system.

Thank you for your attention and consideration.

Sincerely,

Omodamola Eric Williams