

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

SUPPORT

Good evening members of the Montgomery County Council,

My name is Petros Bein and I stand before you today as a 34-year-old black man, a firefighter, former MCPS paraeducator and current graduate student studying to be a teacher, and member of Young People for Progress. I am here to offer my full support for the STEP Act to ban minor traffic stops in Montgomery County. As someone who has lived in this county since childhood and now lives in Clarksburg, I have unfortunately experienced the effects of minor traffic stops firsthand.

I have been stopped by the police multiple times since I was a teenager in Montgomery County. I vividly remember being stopped at the age of fourteen while walking near Lakeforest Mall with a friend after school. The officer said one of us had a laser pointer, which we did not, but we were still searched and my friend was slammed on the hood of the police officers car. We were just two young boys walking home from school, but we were treated like criminals.

As I got older, the stops continued. A few years later, I and some of my friends were pulled over for a minor traffic stop in Germantown for license plate light that was out. Despite not smoking or possessing any weed, we were asked if we were smoking and our car was searched, which made us very scared and confused. It was clear that the officer was looking for any reason to pull us over. It felt like we were being targeted simply because of the color of our skin and the stereotypes that come with it.

These minor traffic stops not only violate our rights, but also have a chilling effect on people in the community. And these experiences of being stopped for police minor traffic stops are shared by countless other black and brown people in Montgomery County, and across the country. These experiences have made me feel alienated from society and less able to participate in my community without being stopped, profiled or harassed. The reality is that minor traffic stops have been used as a pretext for racial profiling and harassment for far too long. The proposed bill to ban these stops is an important step towards ensuring that all members of our community are treated with dignity and respect by law enforcement.

Pretextual stops, which are often used as a reason for minor traffic stops, do not effectively prevent or address crime. Rather, they create a sense of fear and mistrust towards law enforcement. Passing this bill to ban minor traffic stops is a necessary step towards rebuilding trust and ensuring that all members of our community, regardless of race or ethnicity, are treated fairly and equally under the law.

As a firefighter and aspiring teacher, I have dedicated my life to serving my community. But the constant fear of being stopped and targeted by the police simply because of the color of my skin is something that I cannot ignore. I urge you to pass this bill and take a stand against racial profiling and discrimination.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Petros Bein