

Testimony in Support of the STEP Act

To the Honorable Council

Greetings

My name is Robert Stubblefield and I am a resident of Montgomery County. I am also an activist and organizer with organizations such as The Bethesda African Cemetery Coalition, Young People for Progress, DSA, and others to write in support of the STEP act, which would ban minor traffic stops for violations such as tinted windows and expired tags/registration.

The STEP Act is necessary because for decades in Montgomery County, these minor traffic stops have been used as an unjust pretext to search for drugs. In addition, these minor traffic stops have been used to unjustly target Black and Latine people which makes it harder for those who operate a vehicle but it also has the affect of increasing police encounters between black and brown communities. With this usually unjustifiable pretexts, we see an increase not only in police interactions but police violence. Per data compiled by the Office of Legislative Oversight, the MCPD is more likely to stop Black and Latine people 5-10% more during the day than in the evening as the nighttime makes it difficult to identify one's racial and ethnic background. Some people, like Councilmember Jawando have had personal experiences of being racially profiled during a minor traffic violation with the difference being that while it didn't escalate into a violent encounter. This is also confirmed with data by MCPD shown that they are more likely to use violence when dealing with Black and Latine drivers during a traffic stop even though there is no just cause in doing so. Even the Police Chief admitted as such when testifying before some members of the Public Safety Committee. Not only does this cause a nuisance but it has show it does not improve public safety at all.

To be clear, this act, while necessary in the short term, does not address the long standing issue of policing in general. 2022 showed that it was the deadliest year for Black and Latine people in terms of police violence and Montgomery County was no exception. We have yet to reckon with our own ugly pattern of police terrorism here. We must break down the notion that police abolition is too radical. It already exists in parts of Montgomery County, all those of us at the Groundroots demand is that police abolition be applied justly, equitably and equally.