


Carol Stern



TESTIMONY ON Bill 2-24 - FAVORABLE)
Freedom To Leave Act

TO: Montgomery County Council

FROM: Carol Stern

My name is Carol Stern. I am a resident of Montgomery County, a member of the Jews United for Justice Montgomery County Leadership Council and a member of Adat Shalom Reconstructionist Congregation in Bethesda. . I am submitting this testimony in favor of the Freedom To Leave Act.

The Jewish text that shapes my religious and moral conviction that we must approve the Freedom to Leave Act is the directive issued in Deuteronomy 16:20, "Tzedek, tzedek tirdof - Justice, justice shall you pursue." The Jewish sages explain that the word tzedek is repeated not only for emphasis but to teach us that in our pursuit of justice, our means must be as just as our ends. Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan wrote "teach us to respect the integrity of every human soul be it that of a friend or stranger, child or adult." When we are working to reform our justice system, we must demand that it operates in accordance with these deeply held Jewish beliefs.

This Act is an opportunity to seek justice by strengthening public trust in law enforcement and improving data collection transparency related to traffic stops. The Freedom to Leave Act will prioritize 4th Amendment rights and reduce disparities in traffic enforcement by prohibiting consent searches of a motor vehicle or person by a police officer. In addition, the Act will Improve data analysis for traffic stops by requiring the collection of additional data and annual reporting of traffic stop data.

The U.S. Fourth Amendment gives all people the right "to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects against unreasonable searches and seizures." Consent searches create a power imbalance that has produced few results while impacting communities of color greatly, including in Montgomery County. There are clear racial disparities in traffic enforcement. Montgomery County traffic data from FY18 to FY22 revealed that Black drivers made up 30% of traffic stops in an adult population that was 18% Black. We must do better in reforming the justice system in our county and the Freedom to Leave Act will be a great step forward.

I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on Bill 2-24.