

Good Evening Council President Friedson, Councilmembers, staff and Community members.

My name is Esther Wells, and I am here to voice my **strong opposition** to Bill 2-24, Freedom to Leave Act.

Your decision on Bill 2-24 should be whether the Freedom to Leave Act will be additive to Citizen's Safety or just a redundancy that detracts law enforcement officers from choosing to protect and serve in Montgomery County. Our County is facing record high vacancy in public safety jobs. This legislation will exacerbate the problem.

At introduction, Councilman Jawanda stated "A consent search is when you're pulled over or you're stopped and you're asked,..., can I search your person or your vehicle. Under the 4th amendment, you have the right to say no." Currently, when requesting a search of any person or vehicle, Officers must provide notice to the person that they have a right to refuse consent for the search.

Educating and empowering minorities of their Constitutional Bill of Rights, not just the 4th amendment, such as their freedom of speech, freedom to keep and bear arms, freedom of religion, right to remain silent, among others should be the focus!

Because let's face it, we live in an area where virtually all drivers are travelling across multiple jurisdictions for work, school, worship & recreation. Freedom to Leave Act will have very little jurisdiction on correcting what is perceived to be disparity in traffic stops. Whereas increased efforts in educating residents of their Federal Constitutional Rights will cast a wider net and empower residents to exercise their Rights in all jurisdictions within the United States. Knowledge itself is power.

Uniting everyone here today is the need for our families and communities to be safe. Governor Moore's recent State of the State speech, he said "people shouldn't have to choose between feeling safe in their skin and feeling safe in their communities. These are the kinds of false choices that dominate the public safety debate. Do you support law enforcement, or do you want to build stronger neighborhoods?... We're told to pick a side, oftentimes by people who frankly do not have an interest in solving the problem." We can walk and chew gum at the same time.

Councilman Jawando also stated, "data from MCPD last year showed that 1 in 205 traffic stops yielded contraband". The focus shouldn't be on the number of stops, it should be on what's found on the 205th stop. The amount of fentanyl and illegal guns seized and taken off our streets, we will never know how many lives were saved. I suggest you analyze that same data by the amount of drugs and guns recovered and the links that were made to crimes in DC.

In conclusion, I urge the council to reconsider Bill 2-24 and to seek alternative solutions that truly address the underlying issues of educating and empowering residents to exercise their rights and getting illegal drugs and illegal guns off our streets and out of our neighborhoods.

Thank you for your time and consideration.