



Maryland Chapter

7338 Baltimore Avenue, Suite 102
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Committee: Environment and Transportation

Testimony on: HB 973 - "Vehicle Laws – Violations Involving Pedestrians or Bicyclists – Penalties (Pedestrian Safety Act of 2020)"

Position: Favorable

Hearing Date: February 27, 2020

The Maryland Sierra Club supports HB 973, which would establish minimum fines for a range of traffic violations involving the driver of a vehicle failing to stop or yield to pedestrians and bicycle traffic. The bill specifies that the fines would go into a Pedestrian Safety Fund that would be used by the Secretary of Transportation to enhance the safety of roadways for pedestrians and bicyclists near schools and school bus stops.

We live in a car-centric culture where transportation planning, road infrastructure, and vehicle laws are largely focused on enabling drivers to get to their destinations as swiftly as possible. Unfortunately, this has resulted in some drivers feeling they have priority on the road, and that pedestrians and bicyclists have less priority. As a consequence, too many pedestrians, bicyclists and others lawfully crossing roads or operating on the side of the road are seriously injured or killed.

To help address this problem, the bill specifies a number of violations that will be subject to a fine of not less than \$150. The violations include when the driver of a vehicle does not stop before entering a crosswalk when facing a red traffic light or a blinking red traffic light. Other violations listed in the bill include when the driver of a vehicle overtakes and passes a vehicle that is stopped at a crosswalk to let a pedestrian cross the roadway, or when a driver does not yield the right-of-way to a blind, partially-blind, deaf or hearing-impaired pedestrian using a guide dog or carrying a white cane.

The Pedestrian Safety Fund may be used in a number of ways. It could help fund the development of educational programming for bicyclists, motorists and pedestrians to raise awareness of their responsibility to follow the rules of the road. It also could be used for physical design changes to roadways to protect bicyclists and pedestrians such as creating separate bikeways, building sidewalks, narrowing lanes, extending curbs, installing pedestrian control signals and creating safety zones.

In summary, this bill would increase the safety of our roadways particularly for bicyclists and pedestrians, and by doing that it would encourage more biking and walking which would improve public health. That in turn could reduce the number of people driving cars, and thereby reduce the amount of greenhouse gas and other health-damaging pollution generated from vehicle tailpipes. Because of all the positive changes this bill would yield, we urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on it.

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Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America's oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has about 70,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has more than 800,000 members.