



**AAA Mid-Atlantic Testimony**  
**House Bill 0178 – Vehicle Laws – Reckless Driving, Speed Contests, Registration Plates, and**  
**Noise Abatement –Penalties (Delegate Stewart, et al)**  
**Maryland House Environment & Transportation Committee**  
**Thursday, January 21, 2021 1:30 P.M.**

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- Good afternoon. AAA represents nearly one million members across the state of Maryland, and 60 million members nationwide. On behalf of the motoring public and AAA members, as both a motorists' club and a traffic safety organization, we support HB 0178.
- As drafted, the legislation would crack down on “bad actors” and risky drivers who endanger the lives of others and themselves by racing on Maryland roadways, by speeding recklessly and engaging in street races or contests. This measure would also prohibit a driver or vehicle owners from obscuring a registration plate for the purpose of evading law enforcement.
- Although there were fewer vehicles and less traffic on Maryland highways and roadways in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak and during the worsening COVID-19 crisis in 2020, we witnessed a spike in egregious speeding, reckless driving, impaired and drugged on roadways across the state.
- In fact, across the national capital area “speeding became an increased issue in COVID-lightened traffic,” notes the Transportation Planning Board (TPB).
- Despite a drop in traffic volume, many states and jurisdictions saw an increase in the number of fatalities involving both speed and unrestrained drivers and passengers, compared to the same period of time a year earlier or prior to the coronavirus pandemic.
- Nationwide, “11,260 people were killed on U.S. roadways in the third quarter of 2020, a 13.1% increase compared to the same period in 2019,” reported the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA).
- Curiously, during the first nine months of 2020, 28,190 people died in crashes across the United States., according to NHTSA data. For perspective, this comprises a 4.6% increase from the year before.
- Unfortunately, so far, there is little 2020 data for Maryland appertaining to fatal crash rates in the state.
- However, the Maryland State Police ticketed thousands of drivers for dangerous driving during the early stages of the pandemic.
- Some traffic safety advocates worry the coronavirus pandemic seems to have brought out more impaired, risky, and speedy drivers onto roadways across the state of Maryland, across the Washington metro area and across the nation, as well.
- “Sparse traffic on U.S. roads during the coronavirus pandemic has spawned a spike in speeding and other types of reckless driving,” the Governors Highway Safety Association (GHSA) reported in April.
- Tragically, that is the case even though fewer vehicles and fewer motorists were traveling on roadways in the three jurisdictions, the District, Maryland, and Virginia, over the past few months amid the pandemic.
- Another likely factor was the “reduced police presence on roadways during the initial stages of the pandemic,” some research suggests. The answers are far from clear cut, however.

- Traffic crashes, deaths and injuries triggered by unsafe driving behaviors such as speeding, reckless driving, racing, driving under the influence, and not wearing a seat belt, are preventable.
- We can combat such behavior with greater and tougher enforcement.
- Perhaps it is premature to say whether the surge in traffic crashes during the pandemic of 2020 is a one-off situation. AAA is loathed to call for legislation based on situations that occur once in a lifetime or an anomalous, rarefied set of circumstances.
- Yet AAA **supports HB 0178**, and respectfully urges the Committee to render a favorable report.

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