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Health and Government Operations  
Committee

*Subcommittees*

Health Occupations and Long Term Care  
Public Health and Minority  
Health Disparities

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Joint Committee on Program Open Space  
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## **Sponsor Testimony in Support of HB28 - Passenger, Truck, and Multipurpose Vehicles - Annual Registration Fees (Pedestrian Fatality Prevention Act of 2024)**

February 1, 2024

Thank You Chair Korman, Vice-Chair Boyce, and members of the Environment and Transportation Committee, I am Delegate Robbyn Lewis testifying on behalf of HB28 which will help address Maryland’s crisis of road-related deaths by putting a price on the machines that contribute significantly to it.

Please note that amendments to this bill are currently being prepared. A copy of the proposed amendment language will be made available to you. These amendments specify increased registration fees for vehicles that exceed 40” in front-end, or hood height.

For the purposes of this bill, the term “passenger vehicle” or “personal, private vehicle” refers to one that is used by an individual for general, typical, everyday trips. This bill does not intend to affect vehicles that are used for what might be informally referred to as “work vehicles,” i.e., those used for more industrialized or manufacturing or freight purposes, farming, shipping, construction or the like. Current state law does not distinguish between these types of vehicular uses, and this bill does not intend to create new law in that regard. State law refers to “Class A” and “Class M” vehicles; this bill will not change those designations.

The intent of HB28 is to impose increased registration fees on the purchase of new, personal private vehicles that exceed both specific weight and height limits because these vehicles cause disproportionate harm to human beings who are walking.

In 2019, Maryland’s Vision Zero law went into effect. It set a goal of zero motor vehicle-related fatalities or serious injuries by 2030.

Sadly, since that law was passed, road deaths have increased. In 2023 the state passed a grim milestone: more than 600 Marylanders lost their lives in road-related deaths. That number doesn’t begin to account for the number of non-fatal injuries that occurred. In addition to the human toll, health care costs – both physical and mental - and negative economic impacts caused by vehicular crashes are consequential.

Some localities have imposed reduced speeds and camera enforcement to reduce crashes, injuries and fatalities. Given the outcomes, however, more action is needed.

HB28 goes beyond regulating vehicular speeds by increasing registration fees on the heavy and too-tall vehicles that are most likely to cause pedestrian injury and death. To my knowledge, this has never been tried in Maryland.

These big vehicles are glamorized; some are glowingly described in marketing materials as “massive fist[s] moving through the air” conjuring emotions of aggression and impunity that might potentially contribute to the epidemic of reckless, dangerous driving and inevitable fatal crashes we’re now seeing.

The number of human beings who have lost their lives while walking in this country has increased 80 percent since 2009. In 2021, over 7,000 Americans who were walking lost their lives after being struck by a vehicle. Speeding and dangerously designed infrastructure contribute to this increase, but there is a clear and documented relationship to vehicle size and height.

Since the 1990’s the average personal, private, passenger vehicle has grown 4 inches wider, 10 inches longer, 8 inches taller and 1,000 pounds heavier. Many vehicles are more than 40 inches tall at the leading edge of the hood. Let’s not fool ourselves: it doesn’t matter if the vehicle is electric, or fossil fueled. If it is too big and too tall, it is too dangerous.

A recent groundbreaking report by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, which analyzed nearly 18,000 crashes involving a single “passenger” vehicle and a single pedestrian, found that vehicles with hood heights of more than 40 inches and blunt front ends angled at greater than 65 degrees were 44 percent more likely to cause pedestrian fatalities.

Washington, DC looked at the harm, and the evidence, and recently decided to curb the spread of these oversize vehicles by increasing the annual registration fee for cars weighing more than 6,000 pounds. In their first of its kind law, for cars weighing between 3,500 and 6,000 pounds, the fee is between \$175 and \$200, while lighter-weight vehicles pay just \$72. Over ten years, the lighter car would pay just \$720 in fees, while the larger car would cost the owner \$5,000. The bill before you aims to do something similar, but will also account for front-end, or hood height.

HB28 has the potential to encourage new vehicle buyers to consider registration fees in their purchase decisions.

In addition, once amended, HB28 has the potential to fund the state’s Complete Streets Grant Program, which was established in 2018. To my knowledge, this worthy program has never received a mandated appropriation. When Maryland jurisdictions have access to Complete Streets grant funds, they will be able to build more pedestrian-safe infrastructure, and ultimately go a long way towards saving lives, and remedy the negative externalities caused by over-heavy and over-tall passenger vehicles.

Thank you for your consideration. I request a favorable report.

\*Citation: <https://www.musclegcarsandtrucks.com/2020-gmc-sierra-hd-design-the-origin-story/>

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Lewis', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

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