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**Committee: Environment and Transportation**

**Testimony on: HB94 – “Vehicle Laws – Reduction of Speed Limits by Local Authorities”**

**Position: Support with amendment**

**Hearing Date: February 2, 2023**

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club supports HB94, which would authorize local authorities statewide to decrease the maximum speed limit to not less than 15 miles per hour after an engineering and traffic investigation determines that is a reasonable and safe maximum speed limit for that part of the state road.

The bill also specifies a local authority may not implement a new speed monitoring system to enforce speed limits on any portion of a highway for which the speed limit has been decreased to less than 25 miles per hour. The amendment we propose is to delete this provision of the bill for reasons we will discuss below.

HB94 is needed to enable local authorities to slow down drivers on state roads where conditions warrant a slower speed such as blind curves in the road, possibly children playing, or where a number of private homes or businesses are concentrated so there may be a lot of pedestrian traffic and vehicles entering and exiting the road.

We live in a car-centric culture where transportation planning, road infrastructure, and vehicle laws are largely focused on enabling cars and trucks to get to their destinations as swiftly as possible. Unfortunately, this has resulted in some drivers feeling they have priority on the road, and there are high rates of injury and death for pedestrians and bicyclists as well as vehicle drivers and passengers. The correlation between speed, road design, and crash severity is well documented. Combining excessive speed with poor roadway design can yield horrifying results. According to the MDOT Motor Vehicle Administration’s Highway Safety Office, there were 544 traffic fatalities in our state last year, including 139 pedestrian and bicycle deaths.

We propose deleting the provision of the bill that would prohibit implementing a new speed monitoring system because we believe speed monitoring systems are an effective way to force drivers to slow down. The rationale for enforcing a lowered speed limit with speed cameras is the same rationale for this bill being introduced. If an engineering and traffic investigation determines a reasonable and safe maximum speed limit is warranted along a section of state roadway, that speed limit needs to be followed and enforced to increase safety and lessen the possibility of a traffic accident where people may be injured or killed.

In summary, we believe HB94 as amended would allow local authorities to lower the speed limit where needed to increase safety. That would be a positive change, and we urge a favorable report on this bill.

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Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America’s oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 70,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has over 800,000 members and nearly four million supporters.