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Committee: Environment and Transportation
Testimony on: HB 353 – “Traffic Control Device Monitoring Systems - Authorization”
Position: Favorable with Amendment
Hearing Date: February 16, 2023

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club supports HB353, which would allow the use of traffic control device monitoring systems (TCDMS) to capture a recorded image of a traffic violation on State highways if authorized by the State Highway Administration and on highways maintained by a local jurisdiction if authorized by the governing body of that jurisdiction. Before beginning use of TCDMS, the public would need to be informed about it in a local newspaper and via signs prominently posted on highways where the systems might be used.

The recorded image by a TCDMS indicating that the driver of a motor vehicle has committed a violation would include an image of the vehicle, an image of at least one of the vehicle’s license plates, the time and date of the violation, and, to the extent possible, the location of the violation. A citation would be issued to the owner or driver of the vehicle for each violation recorded by a TCDMS and would incur a civil penalty that may not exceed \$40. The fine could be paid without appearing in District Court. Failure to pay the civil penalty or to contest liability in a timely manner would be an admission of liability and could result in suspension of the motor vehicle’s registration.

Transportation is the largest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions in our state. Tailpipe emissions from cars and trucks are also a major source of health-damaging air pollution. This means there is a growing need to get individuals out of their cars, taking transit, riding bikes, and walking more. However, it is difficult to make that happen when those who ride a bike or walk beside the road fear for their safety because of careless drivers.

We live in a car-centric culture where transportation planning, roads, and vehicle laws are focused on getting vehicles 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. According to the Maryland Department of Transportation Motor Vehicle Administration’s Highway Safety Office, there were 544 traffic fatalities in our state last year. Increased use of TCDMS would encourage drivers to obey speed limits, follow all the rules of the road, and make our roads safer for everyone, including bikers, pedestrians and drivers.

One amendment we propose would allow the civil penalty for traffic violations recorded by a TCDMS to be \$40 for the first violation and increased by that same amount for each subsequent violation in that jurisdiction. A \$40 fine that doesn’t get increased when violations reoccur is not much of a disincentive. Allowing traffic control device monitoring systems to be used on state and local highways in Maryland would bring about increased safety on our roads. 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.