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Oct. 4, 2023

Testimony: Greater Greater Washington

- B25-421: The License Suspension Reform Amendment Act of 2023
- B25-422: The Automated Traffic Enforcement Effectiveness Amendment Act of 2023
- B25-425: The Strengthening Traffic Enforcement, Education, and Responsibility Amendment Act of 2023
- B25-435: The Fraudulent Vehicle Tag Enforcement Amendment Act of 2023

Good afternoon. My name is Alex Baca, and I am testifying on behalf of Greater Greater Washington, where I serve as D.C. policy director.

We are supportive of the passage of all bills being heard today.<sup>1</sup> I would like to focus on the Automated Traffic Enforcement Effectiveness Amendment Act. GGWash has repeatedly suggested the wholesale changeover from fines to points, so even allowing the application of points in addition to fines is an important shift in how District law treats those who violate it. Points can't be wiped away with a payment, so they are truly tied to a driver's behavior, and are therefore more illustrative of an individual's understanding that driving is a privilege not to be abused at the expense of others.

Much of the testimony at this hearing has described, in effect, a breakdown of the social contract of safe driving. I don't know that we ever had much of one to begin with, but the lack of any sort of mutually reinforced individual responsibility for driving is in much sharper relief post-pandemic. The District's own policies are partly responsible for that, and I do resent the executive branch's delusion toward or ignorance of the traffic-safety issues that the council, has, thankfully, taken up over the past few years.

A topical example is the ATE task force's failure to take seriously the use of automated traffic enforcement for safety rather than revenue generation. GGWash recently published an op-ed from Passage Safety, by John Leibovitz, who is also testifying today, that proposes enforcing driver behavior via traffic cameras more frequently and broadly, and in doing so impose much smaller fines. John has suggested piloting this type of enforcement and fine structure in school

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<sup>1</sup> GGWash has been continually supportive of the themes and concepts represented by these bills in previous forums, including, but not limited to, the [May 2023 roundtable on automated traffic enforcement](#), the [February 2023 performance oversight hearing for the Department of Public Works](#), the [February 2022 performance oversight hearing for the Department of Public Works](#), the [October 2022 hearing for the Booting and Impoundment Reform Amendment Act of 2022](#), and a [fall 2021 roundtable on automated traffic enforcement](#).

zones, where vehicular speeds are limited to 15 miles per hour and which aligns well with the emphasis on school-zone safety in recent legislation.

I highlight this to note that not only is there a clear constituency for passage of the bills heard today, there's a clear constituency for even greater government action to prevent drivers from killing or injuring people—one that's requesting that the council go beyond what it's proposed here, and offering its own suggestions. Implicit in this constituency's existence is the acknowledgement that self- and social enforcement around norms for driving will only exist reliably if the District's laws determine and regulate them.

To me, this also links to the discussion within the broader topic of fines-versus-points, focusing on the supposed need to identify the driver of a car so as to ensure that the car's owner does not receive points on their license for an infraction that they did not commit. GGWash feels that vehicle owners who let others use their property should be on the hook for infractions committed by the driver of the car, even if a car owner does not commit that infraction themselves. I don't know how to restore, or create, a social contract without that kind of accountability.

Lastly, I'd like to reflect on what feels like a valuable shift in contextualizing, and locating, traffic safety in the council, and the District's, public-policy landscape. I am grateful to the Committee on Transportation and the Environment for holding a joint hearing with the Committee on Operations and Public Works; while this may not seem that groundbreaking, both agencies are responsible in their own ways for preventing people from driving dangerously in the District, and should more frequently be. I thank Councilmembers Nadeau and Allen for working together.

I also thank Councilmember Henderson for her continual integration of traffic-safety legislation into the Committee on Health's agenda. Of some interest in that regard might be a recent analysis commissioned by GGWash hypothesizing what could happen to modal shift, collisions, emissions, physical activity, and access to destinations if vehicle traffic in the District were reduced by 10 percent. One of its findings is:

*A reduction in traffic will have two oppositional effects on road safety. The first effect is that, by reducing the number of cars on the road, it will reduce levels of exposure to collisions. For example, all else being equal, a 1% drop in vehicle travel will cause a 1% drop in injuries and fatalities. But all else is not equal. The second effect is an increase in speeds. By reducing traffic, the remaining vehicles on the road are able to move more quickly, considerably increasing the risk of collisions causing injuries or deaths per vehicle-kilometer traveled. Reducing traffic means that there will be fewer cars, but that each car will be more dangerous.*

*The second effect, the increased danger per vehicle-km, could be negated through use of traffic calming interventions....*

GGWash repeatedly insists—rightfully, we think—that District residents and visitors need to drive less, for every reason: safety, climate change, economic growth, public health. Traffic

calming interventions—physical changes to the District’s roads to slow drivers and make space for those who aren’t driving, *and* enforcement of traffic infractions and illegal tags<sup>2</sup>—are necessary to realize the gains of fewer trips by car. Road design and traffic laws are so obviously interlinked; preventing drivers from injuring or killing themselves or others, too, yokes together numerous functions of governance. It matters greatly to me that a number of councilmembers have made appearances today.

We are happy to answer any questions the committees might have. GGWash is always here as a resource on the intricacies and tradeoffs of traffic safety, and we are thankful to our supporters and endorsed ANC commissioners who testified today. We look forward to continued collaboration between councilmembers and committees to ensure that people in the District of Columbia drive safely, legally, and less.

Thank you.

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<sup>2</sup> In an ideal world, all roads here would be self-enforcing, but I’ve been attempting to foment the political desire (and the laws, and the budgets) to do that for over a decade, and it’s not going to happen in my lifetime.