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**Testimony by Caitlin Rogger, Executive Director
Committee on Transportation and the Environment
DDOT Budget Hearing
October 4, 2023**

Good afternoon Chair Allen, Chair Nadeau, Councilmember Henderson, Councilmember Lewis George, Councilmember Frumin, Councilmember Parker, and colleagues.

I'm testifying on behalf of the DC Sustainable Transportation (DCST) Coalition, of which I serve as executive director. DCST is a nonprofit organization that brings together business, advocacy and government entities to make DC a global leader in fast, reliable, safe and sustainable transportation.

Our members include ten of DC's Business Improvement Districts, the Federal City Council, Events DC, the Coalition for Smarter Growth, the Sierra Club DC chapter, the Greater Washington Partnership, Greater Greater Washington, the Transportation Equity Network, and the Washington Area Bicyclist Association.

I want to start by extending our sincere thanks and appreciation to the Co-Chairs today, and colleagues, for putting together this collaborative hearing, so that these important bills may be considered in a coordinated fashion. Each of these bills and their authors is to be applauded for their focus on safety and looking at this issue as the public health emergency it is.

Collaboration is the secret ingredient to solving a public health emergency (I can say this because it used to be my job, advancing urban health equity for the World Health Organization): whether it's DDOT looking at transportation, or DC Health worrying about rising rates of child injuries, or DPW trying to rein in the lawless driving on our streets, no one agency or councilmember can solve this alone. So the willingness to coordinate among you is deeply appreciated and needed. I'm also particularly appreciative of the engagement of

Councilmember Henderson as there are real opportunities to bring the health and transportation agencies together on these issues.

DCST supports each of these four bills and I'll limit my comments to a few suggestions to make them even more effective.

License Suspension Reform Amendment Act of 2023

We appreciate this bill's focus on creating real disincentives for a wider range of dangerous offenses while driving, as many of our issues relate to a societal relaxing of standards around driving that assumes "no one will punish me, so it doesn't matter how I drive". However, it seemingly inadvertently leaves out a driving offense that is significantly more dangerous even than driving under the influence of substances, and that is distracted driving. Research shows that [texting](#) while driving slows down driver response times by 35%, whereas alcohol slows down responses by 21% and cannabis by 12%.

What that means in practice is that if I step into the road, a driver traveling at 20 miles per hour under normal conditions needs 40 feet to stop and avoid hitting me; a driver at the same speed but under the influence of cannabis needs 45 feet; under the influence of alcohol, they need 48 feet; but if they're distracted by technology, looking at their screen, they need a full 54 feet to not hit me, possibly causing me injury or even death. All of these behaviors must be stopped while driving, but the grim reality is that distracted driving is both more dangerous and much, much more common than driving under the influence: [27% of drivers](#) involved in a crash were using a phone within 60 seconds of impact. I had direct experience of this difference three years ago when a driver, distracted by her phone, had to skid to a halt not to hit my then-six year old crossing our own street. She was two feet away from him when she stopped.

We'd strongly encourage the Council to consider updating the bill to include stronger penalties for driving while distracted by technology. The District could be a leader in recognizing this specific public health risk of distracted driving, and socializing it as a dangerous, non-normative behavior.

Fraudulent Vehicle Tag Enforcement Amendment Act of 2023

We support this bill's capacity to create and maintain a directory of valid temporary and permanent vehicle tags, training District employees to identify these tags, and establishing certain offenses to be immediately tow-eligible. I admit with chagrin, I was surprised to learn that the creation and distribution of falsified vehicle tags was not already classified as forgery, so this is particularly important to establish.

The word "implementation" has been highlighted a few times today, so I want to highlight here the importance of establishing extremely clear thresholds and protocols for District staff to identify fake tags under the proposed bill. If it's remotely ambiguous, with the current administration's recent allergic reaction to traffic enforcement setting the tone for all District

employees, I think we all know it's not going to get enforced. But it's a strong bill and we'd like to see it passed.

ATE Effectiveness Amendment Act of 2023

This bill is appreciated for its focus on driver accountability; by tying driver infractions to consequences for their ability to drive, we can both reduce the inequity of allowing some drivers to "pay their way out of trouble," and we reduce the ability and incentive of dangerous drivers to drive dangerously. It's appropriate to require towing and immobilization of cars with fake tags, or parked cars with five or more unpaid moving violations because these drivers do not currently have an incentive to stop driving in ways that can harm others.

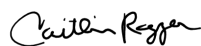
Strengthening Traffic Enforcement, Education, & Responsibility Amendment Act of 2023

This bill is extremely important to the District's ability to maintain order, and safety on our streets, by building some capacity where there currently is very little to enforce our own traffic laws. And it goes all three ways; the focus on reciprocity emphasizes the responsibility of DC drivers to follow Maryland and Virginia laws, undoubtedly their expectation. DCST appreciates this bill's focus on suspending driving privileges when it's subject to repeated infractions; we know that a small number of drivers flout the laws and create the most risk for others, so let's put in place the mechanisms by which these practices can be reined in. We further support the provisions for mandatory reporting on the part of DMV.

I'll close with a general observation that I think several witnesses and indeed Councilmembers have reflected today. Councilmember Allen I saw you at Walk to School Day, and I think everyone there took your message of adult responsibility for the safety of our streets to heart. Thank you for saying that, and for emphasizing accountability and implementation in this hearing. But as I walked away from dropping my kids off at school this morning and saw delivery vehicles double parking outside the school; individual drivers blocking the crosswalks; it underscored to me that more drivers need dramatically different incentives to drive safely and lawfully. We appreciate this committee's focus on bringing that about for the safety and protection of all road users.

Thank you. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Yours sincerely,



Caitlin Rogger

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DC Sustainable Transportation