

Testimony for the 130th Session of the Maine Legislature
Joint Committee for Criminal Justice and Public Safety
Public Hearing February 24, 2021.

In Favor of LD 417

An Act to Protect Maine's Drivers from Pretextual Stops.

Chairperson Deschambault, and honorable Committee Members:

My name is Suzanne Rudalevige and I am currently retired and living in Cape Elizabeth. I am testifying on behalf of the Antiracism Policy Committee of the HopeGateWay United Methodist Church, Portland.

We need legislation in order to stop this discretionary police practice. If a police officer cannot stop a driver on the hope, for example, that they will find something else in the car that constitutes a crime, AND cannot use any evidence they do find on a stop that violates this bill, the motivation to pull over drivers at an officer's discretion will be much curtailed.

This LD limits the intrusion of the police into *any* driver's world but would certainly give greater protection to Black or Brown drivers.

We are all aware that *Driving While Black* is not a figment of imagination - a police practice of pulling over many more Black and Brown drivers than White drivers for a miniscule vehicle code violation. We have a recent example with a Maine State police officer who pulled a driver over for driving in the middle lane of the highway when he was not overtaking, and who was subsequently charged with drug violations.

Our intent is not to impugn individual police officers or police officers as a group. The intent of this bill is to address the system within which they operate, and to ensure that the system is equitable. Being raised in the US has given White people a sense of presumed authority over those who are not White which manifests itself in overreaching behavior when placed in a position of power – and most of our police officers are White. As White, we are often raised to believe that we are more law abiding, more moral, more.... everything good. We know this is not actually true, but it's hard to erase these often unexamined injunctions of upbringing which are imbedded in this culture.

Since it is clear that we cannot change our underlying assumptions on matters of race easily, we therefore need to make laws which will do a better job of controlling inappropriate behavior in those representatives of government to whom we grant authority over others.

Please vote in favor of LD 417.

Thank you. I will be glad to answer any questions.