

Vehicular Noise Reduction Bill Fact Sheet

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Background

During the 2024 Maryland Legislative Session, Delegate Julie Palakovich Carr led state efforts to pass legislation enabling local jurisdictions to establish pilot programs to reduce excessive vehicular noise by implementing a noise abatement monitoring system, also known as noise cameras.

Purpose of the Vehicular Noise Reduction Bill

- Establish a pilot program to enforce existing state exhaust noise laws, using automated “noise camera” devices. For the pilot, the County will be able to place three noise cameras in locations across the county.
- Mitigate negative health and quality of life impacts experienced by residents from excessive noise from modified exhausts.

Health impacts on residents

County residents have experienced excessive vehicle noise caused by defective or altered mufflers and exhaust systems. Noise from these systems interrupt sleep; create noise levels that prevent communication in business, educational, and social settings; and create continuous, high levels of noise, commonly referred to as “noise pollution,” that can lead to physical and mental health issues for children and adults, such as:

- Depression
- Heart disease
- Cognitive impairments
- Strokes

Studies have shown that noise pollution impacts everyone, and disproportionately affects communities of color, immigrants, lower-income people, leaving them unprotected from higher noise levels and greater health risks.

What is a noise camera and how does it work?

- A noise camera also known as an acoustic camera is a device used to detect and measure degrees of noise, especially from vehicles.
- The noise monitoring devices or cameras are equipped with microphones to identify extreme noises that exceed a certain threshold¹. As outlined in the state law, when the volume is detected at least five decibels above the standard set by

the state, the camera captures a video of the vehicle causing the noise for identification.

- Any sound beyond the two-and-a-half lanes of the roadway adjacent to the camera should not be detected, according to MCPD Automated Traffic Enforcement Unit (ATEU) staff.
- All suspected violations captured by noise cameras must be issued in accordance with procedures adopted by the District Court. If the vehicle owner contests the citation, they can request it be reviewed by a designated staff person and/or the court.²

Are modified exhaust systems currently illegal?

- Yes, under the current law, no person may use a muffler or try to bypass a similar device on their vehicle. Vehicles with modified mufflers are rejected during MVA emissions inspection, which is required every two years.
- Maryland has established regulation of a sound limit of 80 decibels for operating and selling vehicles.³
 - According to the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders sounds below 70 decibels are safe. Frequent exposure to 85 or more decibels creates a high-risk.⁴

What is the fine and what is the appeal process?

- The penalty for going above the current noise level is a civil penalty and not a criminal penalty. The first offense results in a warning notice, and second and subsequent offenses each carry a fine not to exceed \$75.

What are the protections for privacy?

- The state law mandates that before any noise camera is installed, the public will be notified of the proposed locations two ways:
 - Installation of signs that let the public know that noise abatement monitoring systems are in use in the area⁵
 - Publication of notice of the location on the County website similar to the [map of speed camera locations](#)
- The noise cameras can only be used to pick up sounds that occur on the roadway to issue noise citations, and not for any other purpose.
- Fines collected can only be used toward the cost of the program or for public safety purposes including pedestrian safety programs.
- The vendor contract to operate the noise cameras cannot be on a per-ticket basis to avoid an inequitable incentive.
- Montgomery County Police must report to the Governor and state legislature by December 1, 2025 data about the pilot program including:

- the time period noise cameras were in use in the county;
- the number of warnings and citations issued over the reported time period, by location and date;
- the costs of implementation; and
- the revenue collected on a monthly basis;
- appropriate locations for the deployment of noise abatement monitoring systems; the performance and reliability of the noise cameras; and
- the effectiveness of noise cameras in reducing noise produced by motor vehicles in the county.

Does this legislation determine the locations where the three cameras will be placed for the pilot?

- No. This legislation authorizes the program to establish the noise cameras pilot. The locations of the noise cameras in the pilot must be appropriately publicly noticed by MCPD with signage near the location, and would be determined by department staff.
- As department staff consider placement locations for the pilot, they should consider racial equity and both the benefits and potential negative impacts on the cameras on communities.

What happens at the end of the pilot? Could more noise cameras than the initial three be placed?

- Under current law, data collected by MCPD during the pilot would be used to inform potential future state policy on noise cameras.
- The state authorization for this pilot program expires June 30, 2026, unless the Maryland General Assembly extends that deadline.

Why do we need to address excessive vehicular noise?

- Almost one-third of Americans are exposed to harmful noise levels.⁶
- Estimates from 2013 show 104 million individuals at risk of hearing loss due to noise exposure, and a great portion of them at risk of health issues such as cardiovascular disease, sleep disturbance, high blood pressure, increase in heart rate, learning, and concentration issues.⁷
- Annual health costs due to hearing loss in the US are estimated to be between \$3.3 and \$12.8 billion.⁸
- Health professionals have reported that noise pollution is common in communities of color and racially segregated cities⁹.

Who's using them and are they producing results?

- New York City
 - A minimum of five cameras in place in 5 different areas, more than 200 violations for modified exhaust and more than 140 for excessive honking.
 - NYC plans to expand within the next 5 years.
- Knoxville, Tennessee
 - Has helped measure the loudest times of the day in Knoxville
 - In just 5 months of the pilot program being installed in February 2022, 1300 cars had set off the noise camera.
- Outside of the U.S. - Australia, London, Paris, Singapore,
 - Cameras in Kensington and Chelsea were installed. In 6 months, 10,000 vehicles triggered the cameras.¹⁰
 - More than 500 of those incidents involved sports cars
 - 300 motorists were caught driving over 100 decibels

Endnotes

1. Arianna Johnson, “What to Know about Noise Cameras - as NYC Lawmakers Consider Cracking down on Illegal Mufflers and Exhaust Systems,” Forbes, May 9, 2024, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ariannajohnson/2023/12/04/what-to-know-about-noise-cameras---as-nyc-lawmakers-consider-cracking-down-on-illegal-mufflers-and-exhaust-systems/>.
2. Vehicle Laws - Noise Abatement Monitoring Systems, H.B 212, 2024, <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2024RS/bills/hb/hb0212E.pdf>
3. Maryland Transportation Section 22-404. “Do You Know How Loud Is Too Loud?,” National Institute of Deafness and Other Communication Disorders, 2020, <https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/news/2020/do-you-know-how-loud-too-loud#:~:text=Sound%20is%20measured%20in%20units,dBA%20can%20cause%20hearing%20loss>
5. Vehicle Laws - Noise Abatement Monitoring Systems, H.B 212, 2024, <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2024RS/bills/hb/hb0212E.pdf>
6. Aron Ranen, “Study: Up to One-Third of Americans Exposed to Dangerous Noise Levels,” Voice of America, August 24, 2023, <https://www.voanews.com/a/study-up-to-one-third-of-americans-exposed-to-dangerous-noise-levels/7238989.html>.
7. David C Holzman, “Fighting Noise Pollution: A Public Health Strategy,” Environmental health perspectives, February 2014, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3915252/>.
8. “Noise as a Public Health Hazard,” American Public Health Association - For science. For action. For health., accessed July 10, 2024, <https://apha.org/Policies-and-Advocacy/Public-Health-Policy-Statements/Policy-Database/2022/01/07/Noise-as-a-Public-Health-Hazard>.
9. “Noise Pollution More Common in Communities of Color and Racially Segregated Cities,” News, June 22, 2018, <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/news/hsph-in-the-news/noise-pollution-segregated-cities/>.
10. “Supercars: 10,000 caught by central London noise cameras since June”, March, 7, 2022