

CHAPTER 384

(Senate Bill 276)

AN ACT concerning

Maryland Quiet Vehicles and Pedestrian Safety Task Force

FOR the purpose of establishing a Maryland Quiet Vehicles and Pedestrian Safety Task Force; providing for the membership and duties of the Task Force; providing for the staffing of the Task Force; prohibiting a member of the Task Force from receiving certain compensation; authorizing a member of the Task Force to receive reimbursement for certain expenses; requiring the Task Force to report to the General Assembly by a certain date; providing for the termination of this Act; and generally relating to the establishment of a Maryland Quiet Vehicles and Pedestrian Safety Task Force.

Preamble

WHEREAS, It is a high priority of this State that the public streets and highways be safe and navigable by both vehicular and pedestrian traffic; and

WHEREAS, Vehicles designed to provide the desirable benefits of reducing harmful pollutants and operating with greater fuel efficiency, including gasoline–electric hybrid and electric–only vehicles, and in the future, other vehicles that rely on fuels and technologies other than the gasoline internal combustion engine, which operate or are likely to operate virtually soundlessly; and

WHEREAS, The Maryland Clean Cars Act of 2007, which requires that by 2011 a certain percentage of the vehicles sold in this State be vehicles that produce lower emissions, will increase the number of hybrid vehicles and other vehicles using technologies other than the gasoline internal combustion engine on the highways of this State; and

WHEREAS, Because blind pedestrians cannot locate and evaluate traffic using their vision, they must listen to traffic to discern its speed, direction, and other attributes in order to travel safely and independently; and

WHEREAS, Pedestrians, cyclists, runners, and small children who are not blind benefit from the multisensory information available from vehicle traffic, including the sound of vehicle engines; and

WHEREAS, Preliminary research conducted by the National Federation of the Blind, the nation’s oldest and largest organization of blind people and the largest organized group of blind people in Maryland, indicates that when operating on electric

power, hybrid vehicles cannot be heard by blind people and others and are, therefore, extremely dangerous when driving on the street, emerging from driveways, moving through parking lots, and in other situations where pedestrians and vehicles come in close proximity to one another; and

WHEREAS, Failure of this State to take immediate action to ensure that blind pedestrians can hear vehicles in all phases of operation is likely to lead to pedestrian injuries and fatalities; and

WHEREAS, Injuries and fatalities may be prevented through vehicle designs that take into account the multisensory nature of traffic detection and a requirement that vehicles emit a minimum level of sound in order to alert all pedestrians, and especially blind pedestrians, to their presence; now, therefore,

SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND, That:

- (a) There is a Maryland Quiet Vehicles and Pedestrian Safety Task Force.
- (b) The Task Force consists of the following members, appointed by the Governor in consultation with the Secretary of Transportation:
 - (1) one representative from the Department of Transportation;
 - (2) one representative from the Department of the Environment;
 - (3) two or three individuals who:
 - (i) represent the organized blind community in this State;
 - (ii) are legally blind; and
 - (iii) have experience or expertise in training blind people to travel safely and independently;
 - (4) two or three individuals representing pedestrian organizations in this State; and
 - (5) one representative of an organization representing the interests of automobile manufacturers.
- (c) The Governor shall appoint a chair of the Task Force from its membership.
- (d) The Secretary of Transportation shall provide staff support for the Task Force from the Department of Transportation.

- (e) A member of the Task Force:
 - (1) may not receive compensation as a member of the Task Force; but
 - (2) is entitled to reimbursement for expenses under the Standard State Travel Regulations, as provided in the State budget.

- (f) The Task Force shall:
 - (1) study:
 - (i) the effects of vehicle sound on pedestrian safety; and
 - (ii) all available technology that may enhance the safety of blind pedestrians;
 - (2) review all available research regarding the effects of vehicle sound on pedestrian safety;
 - (3) consult with:
 - (i) consumer groups representing individuals who are blind, other pedestrians, and cyclists; and
 - (ii) advocates for the safety of children;
 - (4) as appropriate, contract for additional research and studies to be conducted;
 - (5) conduct hearings to accept testimony from:
 - (i) experts on acoustics, automobile design, environmental quality, orientation and mobility for blind people, pedestrian safety, and other relevant fields; and
 - (ii) interested members of the public; and
 - (6) make recommendations concerning:
 - (i) a minimum sound level and the nature and characteristics of the minimum sound to be required for all new vehicles sold and licensed in the State; and
 - (ii) the use of technology to enhance the safety of blind pedestrians.

(g) The Task Force is not required to specify the method or technology through which automobile manufacturers must implement the recommended sound standard.

(h) On or before December 31, 2008, the Task Force shall report its findings and recommendations to the General Assembly, in accordance with § 2-1246 of the State Government Article.

SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect June 1, 2008. It shall remain effective for a period of 7 months and, at the end of December 31, 2008, with no further action required by the General Assembly, this Act shall be abrogated and of no further force and effect.

Approved by the Governor, May 13, 2008.