



SB 50 – Pretextual Stops for Low-Level Violations

SUMMARY

SB 50 would limit racial profiling by prohibiting a peace officer from initiating a motor vehicle or bicycle stop for a low-level infraction, unless there is a separate, independent safety-related basis to initiate the stop.

BACKGROUND

In so-called “pretextual stops,” an officer stops someone for a minor traffic violation, such as tinted windows or expired registration, with the intention of using the stop to investigate a hunch that the individual has committed a more serious crime. These stops, which require no evidence or articulable suspicion of a more serious crime, disproportionately impact communities of color. Data analyzed by the California Racial and Identity Profiling Advisory Board show that people who were perceived as Black were stopped at 2.7 times the rate of people perceived as White. Even more concerning, those perceived to be Black adolescents between 15 to 17 years old were searched at nearly six times the rate of those perceived as White youth.

Once initiated, these stops become racially biased fishing expeditions: Study after study has found that not only do police search Black and Latino people far more often than whites during traffic stops, but also that white people are more likely to be found with contraband. They are also significantly more likely to use force against Black people during these stops.

PROBLEM

Research shows that pretext stops do not significantly benefit public safety, yet use valuable resources that could be directed to more effective public safety approaches. A 2022 study by Catalyst California and ACLU SoCal found that instead of addressing community concerns about serious crime,

Sheriff’s deputies in Los Angeles and Riverside counties spent nearly 9 out of every 10 hours on stops initiated by officers rather than responding to calls for help.

Furthermore, pretext stops can result in devastating harms, particularly to Californians of color — including dehumanization, economic extraction through fees and fines, distrust of the police, degraded public health, and deadly uses of force.

SOLUTION

SB 50 will limit law enforcement’s ability to stop people for minor, non-safety-related traffic infractions, unless there is an independent, safety-related basis to initiate the stop. It will also provide technical clarification to ensure that localities can explore non-law enforcement approaches to traffic safety. In doing so, SB 50 will help protect Californians of color from unnecessary harms and help ensure that public dollars dedicated to community safety are used more effectively.

SB 50 builds on recommendations from the CA Racial and Identity Profiling Advisory Board and the Committee on Revision of the Penal Code to limit enforcement of minor traffic offenses that pose little to no risk to public safety and result in racially biased harms.

SUPPORT

AAPI Equity Alliance
ACLU CA Action
Asian Americans Advancing Justice
Berkeley; City of
CA Alliance for Youth and Community Justice
CA Faculty Association
CA Federation of Teachers
CA Immigrant Policy Center
CA Native Vote Project



CA Public Defenders Association
Californians for Safety and Justice
Californians United for a Responsible Budget
Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice
Charles Houston Bar Association
Children's Defense Fund - CA
Church State Council
Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights
Communities United for Restorative Youth Justice
Consumers for Auto Reliability & Safety
Democrats of Rossmore
Disability Rights California
Ella Baker Center for Human Rights
Empowering Pacific Islander Communities
Fresh Lifelines for Youth
Fresno Barrios Unidos
Indivisible CA Statestrong
Indivisible Yolo
Initiate Justice
Initiate Justice Action
La Defensa
Law Enforcement Action Partnership
Lawyers' Committee for Civil rights of the San Francisco Bay Area
League of Women Voters of CA
Legal Services for Prisoners with Children
Norcal Resist
Oakland Privacy
Pacific Juvenile Defender Center
Peace and Freedom Party of California
People for the American Way
Policylink
Prosecutors Alliance California
San Francisco Public defender
Secure Justice
SEIU CA
Sister Warriors Freedom Coalition
Smart Justice California
Sonoma; County of
SPUR
SURJ North County San Diego
Team Justice
Techequity Collaborative

University of San Francisco School of Law: Racial Justice Clinic
Voices for Progress
Walk Bike Berkeley

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