

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2026 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

House Bill 474 (Delegate Patterson, *et al.*)
Environment and Transportation

Vehicle Laws - Dangerous Accumulations of Snow and Ice - Removal From
Exposed Vehicle Surfaces (Clear Before You Drive Act)

This bill prohibits a person from operating or towing a vehicle without first removing any accumulated snow and ice that poses a threat to persons or property from “exposed vehicle surfaces.” A police officer may enforce a violation of this prohibition only as a secondary offense, except when the violation contributes to an accident resulting in property damage, death, or serious bodily injury. Violations are subject to specified fines, which increase for repeat offenses, violations involving commercial vehicles, or violations that contribute to an accident resulting in property damage or another person’s death or serious bodily injury.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Potential minimal increase in general fund revenues from fines imposed in the District Court. Enforcement can be handled with existing resources.

Local Effect: The bill is not anticipated to materially affect local government finances or operations.

Small Business Effect: Potential minimal.

Analysis

Bill Summary: An “exposed vehicle surface” includes (1) a vehicle’s hood, trunk, windshield, windows, and roof; (2) the cab of a commercial or noncommercial truck; (3) the top of a trailer or semitrailer being towed by a motor vehicle; and (4) the top of a commercial trailer or semitrailer.

A violation of the bill's prohibition is a misdemeanor and subject to the fines listed below.

- Noncommercial vehicles: \$25 for a first offense, \$50 for a second offense, \$100 for a third offense, and \$200 for a fourth or subsequent offense.
- Commercial vehicles: \$75 for a first offense, \$150 for a second offense, \$300 for a third offense, \$600 for a fourth offense, and \$1,000 for a fifth or subsequent offense.
- Contributes to an accident that results in property damage or the death of or serious bodily injury to another person: \$200 to \$1,000 for a noncommercial vehicle and \$500 to \$1,500 for a commercial vehicle.

Current Law: "Serious bodily injury" means an injury that creates a substantial risk of death or causes serious permanent or serious protracted (1) disfigurement; (2) loss of the function of any body part, organ, or mental faculty; or (3) impairment of the function of any body part or organ.

With specified exceptions, § 21-1104(c) of the Transportation Article prohibits driving a vehicle on a highway with any object, material, or obstruction located in or on the vehicle (or hanging from the rearview mirror) in such a way as to interfere with the clear view of the driver through the windshield. Similarly, subject to specified exceptions, § 21-1104(d) prohibits a person from driving a vehicle with any sign, poster, card, sticker, or other nontransparent material on the windshield, side wings, or side or rear windows of the vehicle. A person who violates either prohibition is guilty of a misdemeanor and is subject to a maximum fine of \$500.

The District Court prepayment penalties are \$110 for a violation of § 21-1104(c) and \$70 for a violation of § 21-1104(d), and the Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA) must assess one point against a violator's driver's license for either offense. If, however, a violation contributes to an accident, the prepayment penalties increase to \$150 and \$110, respectively, and MVA must assess three points against the violator's license.

Generally, violations of the Maryland Vehicle Law are subject to primary enforcement. Accordingly, a police officer may detain a driver for a suspected violation of most provisions of the Maryland Vehicle Law without having to first suspect a violation of another State law. However, § 21-1104(c) is among the provisions of the Maryland Vehicle Law that is subject only to secondary enforcement.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has not been introduced within the last three years.

Cross File: SB 698 (Senator McCray) - Judicial Proceedings.

Information Source(s): Judiciary (Administrative Office of the Courts); Department of State Police; Maryland Department of Transportation; Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - February 18, 2026
jg/aad

Analysis by: Ralph W. Kettell

Direct Inquiries to:

(410) 946-5510

(301) 970-5510