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Keep right, pass left — there ought to be a law

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You're zipping along up U.S. 340 with the windows down, "Brown-Eyed Girl" is on the radio and you're happy to be getting where you're going when you come up on a tractor-trailer straining to make the hill. So, you signal left, move left, only to discover someone taking up real estate in the left-hand lane, moving slower than a molasses spill. You flash your lights, you honk your horn, you ride their bumper, you try some hand signals, but they just won't move to the right. What to do. What to do.

Delegate William Folden has proposed a bill that would make left lanes passing-only lanes on highways in Maryland with at least three lanes.

If the bill passes it might take some getting used to for Maryland motorists. The state is one of only a handful with more relaxed "keep right" laws, only requiring drivers to stay in the right lane if they're traveling 10 mph under the speed limit, or slower than the flow of traffic, otherwise left lane driving is allowed. Twenty-eight states plus the District of Columbia require drivers to move over if they're going slower than normal traffic, while 10 others allow the left lane to be used for turning only. In five of those states, fines can be as high as \$1,000.

The passing lane rule Folden proposes would only apply to three-lane roads. Folden, a Frederick County Republican lawmaker and area police officer said he hopes it might ultimately spur a change in driving habits toward right-lane driving only so that the statute might be expanded to include two-lane roads as well. The law wouldn't apply during traffic jams or during bad weather or road hazards. The bill wouldn't apply to carpool lanes either.

There is widespread support for increasing restrictions on left-lane driving in Maryland. In 2013, a ticket issued to a woman driving just below the speed limit in the left-hand lane on Interstate 95 in Prince George's County generated a lot of attention to incidents of left-lane traveling, with many voicing support for changing the law. The citation against the woman was later withdrawn by Maryland State Police.

We hope the bill gets a serious look by state lawmakers. There's evidence that suggests that one of the primary causes of road-rage incidents is slow-poke drivers in the left lane (that and texting while driving). They force more frequent lane changes on other drivers, including passing on the right, where drivers are merging into traffic from intersections and off-ramps. But a law alone won't change behavior and the police can't ticket every left-lane road hog. If the bill passes, the best way to educate drivers about the change might be to place signage on the roads where it will apply.

Keep right, pass left. We can get behind that.