

Committee: Appropriations Committee
Testimony on: HB 19 - "Safe Walk to School Act"
Organization: Climate Parents of Prince George's
Person Submitting: Joseph Jakuta, Lead Volunteer
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: January 18, 2022



Climate Parents of Prince George's supports HB 19, "Safe Walk to School Act".

Schools that are safe to walk or bicycle to are an important asset for our children. Studies have found that increased physical activity leads to improved academic performance.¹ There is numerous evidence linking health and well being with increased physical activity.² As students age and mature, being able to access school on their own also allows for more opportunities for extracurricular activities, an increased relationship with the learning environment, and a greater sense of independence.

There are other benefits from decreasing the number of vehicles at schools, which would happen if schools were safer to walk or bike to. There would be a decrease in the amount of vehicles idling at pick up and dropoff, which cleans the air and is very important for people suffering from asthma.³ Decreasing the number of vehicles also will lead to less accidents involving personal vehicles and students, which is a concern given the high rates of distracted driving that have been observed at schools.⁴ In fact a 2009 survey found that 30 percent of people cited dangerous walking conditions as the largest impediment to walking to school behind distance.⁵

Since April 2021 a group of elected officials, advocates, students, and Prince George's County (PGC) school staff has been meeting as directed by the PGC Board of Education in order to develop a plan that would among other things, end use of fossil fuel powered buses in PGC by 2040. This work has involved a great amount of fact finding, including multiple surveys of students. While electric buses are the most popular solution and necessary for most students, there is a significant number of students that must walk or bike due to their proximity or cannot bus home due to extracurriculars and need safe routes (estimates from 2009 found nationally that about 13% of students walk or bike).⁶ The PGCPs students made it clear that having safe routes to school, with good sidewalks, bike lanes, crossing guards, and other safety features is vitally important to their ability to safely arrive at school and return home. The "Safe Walk to School Act" would be a large step in the right direction towards making their trips safe.

As minor edit, we would request that 5-324 (C)(3) should include an evaluation of bicycle parking and other needed infrastructure (e.g., repair racks).

We encourage a FAVORABLE report for this important legislation.

¹ Center for Disease Control. 2010. "The Association Between School-Based Physical Activity, Including Physical Education, and Academic Performance." https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/health_and_academics/pdf/pa-pe_paper.pdf

² American Heart Association. "What's the Link Between Physical Activity and Health?" <https://www.heart.org/en/health-topics/cardiac-rehab/getting-physically-active/whats-the-link-between-physical-activity-and-health>

³ Department of Energy. "Reducing Vehicle Idling Time at School Helps Kids—and Parents—Breathe Easier." <https://www.energy.gov/energysaver/articles/reducing-vehicle-idling-time-school-helps-kids-and-parents-breathe-easier>

⁴ Safe Kids Worldwide. "Alarming Dangers in School Zones." https://www.safekids.org/sites/default/files/alarming_dangers_in_school_zones.pdf

⁵ Safe Routes to School. http://guide.saferoutesinfo.org/introduction/the_decline_of_walking_and_bicycling.cfm

⁶ Safe Routes to School. http://guide.saferoutesinfo.org/introduction/the_decline_of_walking_and_bicycling.cfm