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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Sponsor Testimony on HB 19 – The Safe Walk to School Act

Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Chang, Colleagues,

Thank you for the opportunity to present today on my legislation HB 19, The Safe Walk to School Act. It's an honor to serve on this committee and to testify before you this afternoon.

Crossing the road can be a dangerous undertaking in Maryland. Almost everyone is a pedestrian at one time or another so pedestrian safety affects all of us. Multiple challenges face us as we work to keep pedestrians safe – communities and neighborhoods built without crosswalks, young students walking to school, distracted cell phone users not paying attention, and a road network designed for speed and cars not walkers and bikers. It is time for schools, parents, and communities to work together to ensure safe routes for all pedestrians, particularly families and students walking to and from school.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration:

- In 2019, 6,205 pedestrians were killed and another 76,000 were injured nationwide.¹
- A pedestrian was killed every 85 minutes in traffic crashes in 2019.²

In Maryland, the number of pedestrian fatalities continues to mount:

- On average, over the past five years in Maryland, 120 pedestrians have been killed and 2,772 have been injured each year.³
- In 2020, there were 131 pedestrians were killed and nearly 2,338 injured.⁴
- In 2020, 16 bicyclists were killed and over 600 were injured.⁵
- Since the beginning of the pandemic, there have been fewer cars on the road, but the rate of speed has increased dramatically. According to the Maryland State Police, 69% of speeding citations issued from March 16 to April 17 2021 cited drivers exceeding posted speed limits by 20 mph or higher. More than 375 citations noted speeds of 90 mph or more.⁶ This reckless driving poses a particular danger to students walking to school.

¹ <https://www.nhtsa.gov/road-safety/pedestrian-safety>

² Ibid.

³ <https://zerodeathsmd.gov/resources/crashdata/>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ <https://www.thebaynet.com/articles/0520/maryland-pedestrian-fatalities-decrease-in-2019-overall-roadway-fatalities-increase.html#:~:text=Glen%20Burnie%2C%20Md.,compared%20to%20133%20in%202018.>

Pedestrians should feel safe at all times for making environmentally friendly choices of choosing to walk places instead of relying on transportation.

This bill is simple and straightforward. It requires school districts to develop pedestrian safety plans as part of the school construction process when building new schools or building significant new additions to existing schools.

Specifically, the bill requires that:

- 1) School districts seeking state funds for the construction of a new school or additions to an existing school, which would increase the capacity by more than 100 students, to submit a pedestrian safety plan to the IAC;
- 2) The safety plan must identify existing and potential safe routes for students to walk or bike to school;
- 3) The safety plan must evaluate existing infrastructure, including sidewalks, along current and potential routes to determine if increased capacity is needed;
- 4) An analysis of existing and potential school zones, including the need for expanding school zones on state and county roads; and
- 5) Schools districts must submit documentation of public participation related to the safety plan including minutes from a public meeting.

This all must be done in collaboration with local Departments of Transportation and the State Highway Administration as needed. By bringing together schools, community stakeholders, students and parents, this bill provides a critical step forward in developing comprehensive plans to protect our children as they travel to and from school.

The bill passed this committee last session 19-4 and the full House 106-25. I urge you to once again provide a favorable report on HB 19.