



Senate Bill 11

Motor Vehicles – Establishment of School Zones

MACo Position: **OPPOSE**

To: Environment and Transportation Committee

Date: March 23, 2023

From: Sarah Sample

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **OPPOSES** SB 11. This bill would shrink the current default size of a school zone in all counties from a half-mile radius to just five hundred feet from a school – *up to a 99% reduction in school zones*. There is no policy justification for this drastic decrease in safety measures. SB 11 would eliminate the many layers of pedestrian protection and roadway safety designed to keep students safe in areas where school bus service is necessarily limited.

Safety around schools should be the rule, not the exception. No Maryland families, or neighborhoods, have raised complaints that school zones – with their obvious markings and tools to promote safe driving – are unwarranted. However, SB 11, as amended by the Senate, requires extensive and expensive studies for nearly all of today's school zones to retain their protections available today.

Undermining public safety programs in these targeted areas sets an alarming precedent and puts communities at risk. There are three major concerns this bill represents for counties: the severe safety implications that come with a mandated loss of protected radius around a school; the high cost to adjust existing infrastructure for school zone boundaries and complete a traffic engineering study for every school in their jurisdiction; and the overlay of these factors onto an already challenging labor market for providing bus service.

This bill would effectively require the adjustment of timed speed limits, traffic easing mechanisms, safety signage, and other enforcement tools around all existing school zones. Specifically, reducing the use of speed cameras in neighborhood streets, a proven tool to combat unsafe driving patterns, is unwise public policy. There would be no remaining infrastructure to slow down a car before it is effectively on the school property.

Currently, school bus services do not typically operate within the neighborhoods immediately surrounding a school and those students generally use these roadways on foot, by bicycle, scooter, skateboard, etc. The acute labor-driven bus service shortage has limited the availability of buses in neighborhoods directly adjacent to school zones and, therefore, the number of students on the streets around schools has significantly increased. *Realistically, this bill would decrease the area protected as a school zone at a time when the safety demands in this area are increasing significantly.*

SB 11 would limit safety measures around our schools, in the areas where schoolchildren need them most. Accordingly, MACo urges an **UNFAVORABLE** report for SB 11.