



Office of The Mayor Celina R. Benitez

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OPPOSITION for SB11 : Motor Vehicles - Speed Limits – School Zones

To: Environment and Transportation Committee
Room 251
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

From: Mayor Celina Benitez, City of Mount Rainier
Date: March 16, 2023

Dear Chairman Barve and members of the Committee:

I am writing on behalf of the City of Mount Rainier to express our **OPPOSITION to Senate Bill 11**, which aims to reduce the radius around a school in which a "school zone" may be designated from 0.5 miles to 0.1 mile. We stand against this bill, as it would significantly limit the ability of our city and other municipalities in Maryland to implement essential vehicular safety measures around schools.

The current school zone designation carries two crucial safety features, which can be employed by municipal governments to enhance the safety of nearby roadways:

1. The speed limit can be lowered to 15 MPH during school hours, and
2. Speed monitoring cameras may be installed and operational only between 6 am and 8 pm on weekdays.

Both of these measures have proven to be effective in reducing speeding and, as a result, increasing the safety of schoolchildren, Seniors, walkers, bus riders and those that use bikes as a means of transportation in our community. The proposed reduction in school zone radius would severely hinder our ability to use these vital tools in areas that we believe are necessary for adequately protecting our children from speeders.

The City of Mount Rainier has **two Elementary Schools** which are located in the middle of our residential community, with many of our students living within walking distance and many of them on the .5 mile mark are those that live in the apartments. However, that walk to school is already too dangerous, including the main streets leading to our schools doubling as a favored route for commuters to cut through our residential neighborhood to avoid the heavier traffic of other major roads. This legislation would take away what little school zone protections our students do have – and those most disproportionately and negatively impacted by these changes would be our lowest-income families living in apartment buildings furthest from our school, and with the longest, most dangerous routes to walk.

SB0011's definition of a school zone may work for schools elsewhere in Maryland where most students arrive by car or bus, but **it is dangerous and potentially deadly** for schools like ours. This issue is too complex – and neighborhoods throughout the state too diverse – for a one-size-fits-all statewide policy.

Public policy should not reward drivers who can't be bothered to yield to a child in a crosswalk or follow basic speed limits around our schools - and it must not prioritize speeders over school and student safety. The answer for not receiving a speeding citation is easy: don't put our children and community in danger by speeding. A child that is walking to school being hit by an automobile going above speed is deadly for the child. Our duty as legislators is to protect and speak for the most vulnerable in this case the kids walking to school.

We urge you to reconsider the provisions of SB 11 and maintain the current school zone radius of 0.5 miles and also keep the speed cameras. This will enable the City of Mount Rainier and other municipalities in Maryland to continue implementing effective safety measures in our communities and ensure the well-being of our schoolchildren.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. **We respectfully request an UNFAVORABLE report on SB 11 from this committee.** Please don't hesitate to contact me MayorBenitez@MountRainierMD.org should you have any questions.

Respectfully,

Celina R. Benitez

Mayor Celina Benitez, City of Mount Rainier, Maryland
First Latina Mayor of The City of Mount Rainier
First Latina Mayor of a City in the State of Maryland