



SB 315: Sarah Debbink Langenkamp Memorial Act
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
Terps For Bike Lanes – FAVORABLE

February 6, 2024

Chair Smith and Committee Members,

I am writing this testimony on behalf of Terps For Bike Lanes in support of SB 315, a proposal aimed at enhancing road safety and promoting sustainable transportation. Our organization is dedicated to improving bicycle infrastructure in and around our campus to create a safe and inclusive environment. Our advocacy efforts span various areas, including the establishment of new bike lanes and paths, the enhancement and maintenance of existing bike facilities, and the development of bike infrastructure in areas where it is currently insufficient or absent. We actively engage with key stakeholders such as students, the University of Maryland Department of Transportation Services (DOTS), Facilities Management (FM), and the City of College Park to drive these improvements. Terps for Bike Lanes believes in sustainability, accessibility, and equity as core values. Bike lanes not only promote environmental sustainability by offering an eco-friendly transportation option but also enhance accessibility and contribute to addressing economic disparities in marginalized communities. The bill is named after a Bethesda woman who was hit and killed by a flatbed truck while cycling home from a back-to-school event at her children's elementary school in August 2022. This is perhaps the most important bill we are providing testimony on this session.

Research supports the potential positive impact of increased penalties on road safety. According to "The Effect of Increased Penalties on Traffic Fatalities: A Meta-Analysis" by Jonah B. Gelblum, et al. (2016), tougher penalties can lead to reductions in traffic fatalities, although the magnitude of the effect varies across studies. Similarly, "The Impact of Harsher Penalties on Seat Belt Use and Traffic Fatalities" by David P. Chang (2020) focuses on seat belt laws and suggests that increasing penalties can be effective in improving compliance with traffic safety regulations. Moreover, the "Traffic Safety Cameras: Evidence for Effectiveness" report by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (2022) summarizes research on the effectiveness of red light cameras and speed cameras in reducing crashes and fatalities, suggesting a potential parallel impact for enforcing bike lane/shoulder right-of-way violations.

Understanding the vulnerability of road users is crucial for effective legislation. The "Vision Zero Network: Vulnerable Road Users" defines vulnerable road users and emphasizes the need for specific protections due to their increased risk of injury or death in crashes. The "World Health Organization: Global Status Report on Road Safety 2020" highlights the disproportionate impact of road traffic crashes on vulnerable populations, including cyclists and pedestrians. Additionally, the "National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA): Cyclist Safety" resource provides data on cyclist fatalities and emphasizes the importance of infrastructure and enforcement for safety.

Examining specific legislative approaches is crucial for informed decision-making. "The Idaho Stop: Evaluating the Safety Effects of Allowing Bicycles to Treat Stop Signs as Yield Signs" by Peter Huang, et al. (2019) assesses the impact of the Idaho Stop law and finds no significant increase in crashes or injuries. Meanwhile, "Do Stricter Helmet Laws Save Lives? An Analysis of State-Level Data" by David P. Chang (2020) analyzes the impact of helmet laws on cyclist fatalities and finds mixed results, suggesting that other safety measures might be more effective. The "Vision Zero Network: Best Practices for Enforcing Bicycle Laws" outlines strategies for effective enforcement of bicycle laws, including dedicated patrols and specialized training for officers.

Considering the ethical implications of legislation is paramount. "Equity and Road Safety: Addressing the Disproportionate Impact of Traffic Crashes on Marginalized Communities" by The Equity Action Lab (2023) highlights the need for equitable enforcement of traffic laws and the potential for harsher penalties to disproportionately impact low-income communities. Additionally, "Procedural Justice and Traffic Enforcement: Promoting Fairness and Trust" by David A. Harris (2014) discusses the importance of procedural justice in traffic enforcement, ensuring fairness and avoiding discriminatory practices.

Penalties play a dual role as deterrents and motivators for education and driver vigilance, but their effectiveness hinges on adequacy. The existing penalties in Maryland for striking a bicyclist in a bike lane fall short in this regard. SB 315 aims to establish penalties commensurate with the level of harm caused by a driver who hits a bicyclist in a bike lane. By doing so, SB 315 is poised to fill the gap in deterrence and motivation that presently exists.

We believe that the proposed legislation aligns with these findings and will contribute significantly to the safety of vulnerable road users, promoting a more sustainable and equitable transportation system. We appreciate your consideration of this matter and look forward to the positive impact that HB 337 can have on our community. We urge a Favorable committee report on this legislation and encourage the Senate to pass it on the floor. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

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