

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2026 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

Senate Bill 71
(Senator Ellis)

Education, Energy, and the Environment

Education - Interjurisdictional Safe Pathways Commission - Establishment

This bill establishes the Interjurisdictional Safe Pathways Commission to identify, coordinate, and secure funding for safe pathways for students traveling to and from school. The bill specifies commission membership and requires the commission to collaborate with local governments, State agencies, and relevant stakeholders to develop infrastructure, programs, and grant strategies. The commission must take certain actions relating to safe pathways including identifying gaps, evaluating funding needs and opportunities, developing a strategic plan, recommending policies to maximize funding, identifying public-private partnership models, and fostering community engagement. The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) must provide staff for the commission. The commission must report to the Governor and specified committees of the General Assembly annually by December 1 on current safe pathways, opportunities for funding, policy and infrastructure recommendations including legislation or budgetary appropriations as necessary, and progress in implementing interjurisdictional coordination.

The bill terminates September 30, 2033.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: General fund expenditures for MSDE increase by \$90,600 beginning in FY 2027 for a contractual commission staffer. MSDE general fund expenditures increase by an additional \$750,000 in FY 2027 to conduct an initial comprehensive inventory of current safe pathways. Other State agencies can designate commission members as required using existing resources. Expense reimbursements for commission members are assumed to be minimal and absorbable within existing budgeted resources. Revenues are not affected.

(in dollars)	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030	FY 2031
Revenues	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
GF Expenditure	840,600	105,300	109,900	114,600	119,500
Net Effect	(\$840,600)	(\$105,300)	(\$109,900)	(\$114,600)	(\$119,500)

Note: () = decrease; GF = general funds; FF = federal funds; SF = special funds; - = indeterminate increase; (-) = indeterminate decrease

Local Effect: Local governments can likely coordinate with the Interjurisdictional Safe Pathways Commission as needed using existing resources. Local revenues are not affected.

Small Business Effect: Minimal.

Analysis

Bill Summary: Under the bill, “safe pathways” means physical infrastructure to ensure safe routes for students traveling to and from school, including sidewalks, crosswalks, traffic calming measures, bike lanes, pedestrian bridges, and school zone signage. Safe pathways also includes education programs and policy initiatives that promote safe routes for students traveling to and from school.

The commission must meet at least four times a year, or as necessary to fulfill its duties. Each member serves for a term of three years, and the Governor must designate a chair of the commission. Commission members may not receive compensation for serving on the commission but are entitled to reimbursement for expenses under the Standard State Travel Regulations as provided in the State budget.

Current Law: The Interagency Commission on School Construction (IAC) manages State review and approval of local school construction projects. Each year, local school systems develop and submit to IAC a facilities master plan that includes an analysis of future school facility needs based on the current condition of school buildings and projected enrollment. The master plan must be approved by the local school board. Subsequently, each local school system submits a capital improvement plan to IAC that includes projects for which it seeks planning and/or funding approval for the upcoming fiscal year, which may include projects that the local school system has forward funded. In addition to approval from the local school board, the request for the upcoming fiscal year must be approved by the county’s governing body.

State Fiscal Effect: General fund expenditures for MSDE increase by \$840,600 in fiscal 2027, which accounts for the bill’s October 1, 2026 effective date. Future year expenditures increase by \$105,300 in fiscal 2028 and \$119,500 by fiscal 2031.

MSDE has determined that one regular full-time position and two contractual positions are needed to implement this bill. However, the Department of Legislative Services (DLS) advises that the added responsibilities incurred by this legislation are not permanent and, thus, may be performed entirely by contractual employees. DLS also advises that, given the large membership of the commission and the additional expenditures to support technical work described below, the commission can likely be staffed with only one new contractual employee. Although MSDE advises that its Office of School Facilities and

Transportation is fully extended by existing regulatory and oversight duties, this analysis also assumes MSDE can shift resources within the department to cover administrative requirements for the commission that lie beyond the capabilities of one additional full-time contractual employee and the commission members. This estimate therefore reflects the cost of hiring one contractual commission coordinator to staff the commission and lead coordination among members, local governments, and other State agencies. It includes a salary, fringe benefits, one-time start-up costs, and ongoing operating expenses. This estimate also includes \$750,000 in general fund expenditures in fiscal 2027 to contract for the development of a safe pathways inventory assessment due to the complexity of conducting such an assessment.

Contractual Position	1.0
Salary and Fringe Benefits	\$81,480
Contractual Services/Programming Costs	750,000
Other Operating Expenses	<u>9,141</u>
Total FY 2027 State Expenditures	\$840,621

Future year expenditures reflect a full salary with annual increases and employee turnover as well as annual increases in ongoing operating expenses. Future year expenditures also assume completion of the inventory assessment and termination of related costs in fiscal 2027. This analysis also assumes an initial inventory assessment is sufficient to inform the work of the commission through fiscal 2034. To the extent that updates or additional inventory assessments are required in subsequent fiscal years, MSDE may experience additional contractual expenditures in the out-years.

This estimate does not include any health insurance costs that could be incurred for specified contractual employees under the State's implementation of the federal Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

The Maryland Department of Health (MDH) also advises that the agency requires one regular part-time health policy analyst to serve on the commission throughout its duration. However, given MSDE's primary responsibility for staffing the commission, DLS advises that MDH can likely appoint an individual to serve on the commission using existing resources.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has not been introduced within the last three years.

Designated Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Maryland State Department of Education; Maryland Department of Disabilities; Maryland Department of Health; Maryland Department of Transportation; Department of Legislative Services

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jg/hlb

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