

HB 615: Education - School Construction - Pedestrian Safety Plans.

Meredith Chaiken, parent of two children, Margaret Brent Elementary School, Baltimore City

Position: Favorable

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on HB 615, which would require the integration of pedestrian safety planning with the construction of new schools.

My family has lived in Charles Village, Baltimore City, since our oldest turned 1 year old. We live on St. Paul St., a major thoroughfare that brings tens of thousands of cars downtown - very quickly- every morning at rush hour. We are also scrambling to walk our children to Margaret Brent Elementary school - our neighborhood public school - by the 8:00 bell those same mornings.

Our older child is now in 4th grade. He has been walking to school since he was 4 years old and entering Pre-K. Our younger child is in 1st grade at Margaret Brent. Both boys would like to walk themselves to school in the morning. It is an important experience many children use to develop their independence, awareness, and confidence. However, our streets prioritize cars over pedestrians, and commuters over communities.

This bill will require school systems to account for the safety needs of our most vulnerable pedestrians - by instituting common sense measures, like requiring the development of a pedestrian safety plan, identifying and evaluating safe routes to school, and engaging the public - including parents and students - in the process.

We spent quite a lot of time, money, and energy ensuring that our students are safe while at school. We must also expand our thinking to consider children's safety to and from school. I urge you to support HB 615.

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