

Good Afternoon Members of the Maryland State Assembly,

My name is Nikhitha Balijepalli, and I am here representing the Montgomery County Regional Student Government Association (MCR-SGA). MCR is devoted to advocating on behalf of students throughout every part of Montgomery County. We maintain a firm commitment to ensuring that all students feel safe when traveling to and from school.

Before I moved to Maryland in eighth grade, I lived in Wisconsin. My neighborhood in Madison was located in a relatively normal suburban area when it came to transportation and pedestrian safety. Roads were usually clear and stayed safe despite having extremely icy conditions during the winter time. There were some abnormal incidents of car crashes but nothing out of the ordinary. As a result of that, I had never grown up hearing too much about pedestrian safety or any issues surrounding it.

That was until I moved to Maryland. A state where it seems a new car crash happens every day. On average, 400 people get into car crashes in Montgomery County every year. In the past few days alone there have been two car crashes in Montgomery County. One resulted in a pedestrian found dead while the other left three people injured. It's strange that a state like Maryland, which gets significantly less snowfall and weather conditions than a colder place like Wisconsin, has far more car accidents every year. The impact that unsafe roads have on students shows itself every day. Pedestrians five to fifteen years of age are at the greatest risk of being involved in a pedestrian related accident. It is absolutely outrageous that kids cannot feel safe just to walk or bike to school, afraid they may get seriously hurt or injured.

Members of the General Assembly, as a sophomore in high school who is concerned about the safety of my fellow Maryland peers, I urge you to pass HB 615. The bill will go far in helping our communities address the unsafe roads and sidewalks near and around school zones. Maryland needs to make sure that all students feel safe and secure when going to school and this bill is an important step in helping us get there. Thank you.