

BILL: Senate Bill 65
TITLE: Counties - Construction of Sidewalks and Crosswalks -
Safe Alternative Routes to Public Schools
DATE: January 22, 2020
POSITION: OPPOSE
COMMITTEE: Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee
CONTACT: John R. Woolums, Esq.

The Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE), representing all of the state's local boards of education, opposes Senate Bill 65 to require each local school board to annually prepare a report on safe alternative routes to public schools and impose a mandate on local governments to construct sidewalks in accordance with the report.

MABE places a high priority on student safety, especially in the daily transportation to and from school of nearly 900,000 students each school day. The arrival and departure of many of these students is within proximity of schools in which bus serves are not provided. For these students, local school systems have adopted policies and procedures to ensure that safe routes to and from school are available.

Generally, getting students to and from school safely is a partnership between the home and the school. Each local school system provides parents with educational information and resources on pedestrian and bus safety in addition to the training and resources provided to students. Parents are primarily responsible for identifying the appropriate walk route from home to school or the bus stop, with school systems providing information and recommendations to assist them in identifying an appropriate walking route for their children.

MABE appreciates the intended benefit of this legislation in enhancing the opportunity for local governments to access available state and federal funding to construct sidewalks and crosswalks in order to improve the quality and safety of routes to and from school. However, this bill would impose an immediate and substantial burden on each local school system to identify such routes and the needed improvements as defined in the bill, while calling on local governments to fund the construction of sidewalks and crosswalks on county roads and develop plans to address school routes involving state roads. In this way, the bill would impose an immediate burden of additional liability for local school systems without a reasonable assurance that the identified needs would be addressed in a timely manner by our state and local funding authorities.

For these reasons, MABE requests an unfavorable report on Senate Bill 65.