



House Bill 849

School Bus Stops – Violations – Enforcement and Safety Measures

MACo Position: **OPPOSE**

To: Judicial Proceedings Committee

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From: Sarah Sample

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **OPPOSES** HB 849. This bill would require county law enforcement agencies to issue a warning instead of a citation for a certain school bus stop violation on state highways. This restriction involves only a violation that is recorded on a highway with four or more lanes by a vehicle traveling in the opposite direction of the school bus.

There is no question that the violation addressed in this bill – driving through a school bus stop sign while the bus is stopped to deliver schoolchildren – is inherently dangerous. This is exactly why Maryland created heightened penalties for offenders – a \$250 penalty for an infraction caught by camera, \$500 if caught by an officer, and three points on a license. Among scores of motor vehicle violations outlined in the Maryland Transportation code, only a fraction carries a penalty in excess of \$250 due to the catastrophic safety risk they pose to the public, and in this particular case, to the school-age children whose safety we seek to assure.

Requiring counties to give a warning instead of a citation for a first-time violation of an offense of this magnitude is irresponsible and counter to the very reason this offense bears such a substantial penalty. Research shows that when citations are issued for this infraction, behavior changes. The recidivism rate is one of the lowest for motor vehicle violations. Research also shows that this is a violation that happens often. It would stand to reason that educating the public is a more prudent approach to limiting the number of overall violations of this nature, while the requirement to send a warning would almost certainly result in additional offenses, and jeopardized safety at school bus stops.

School bus monitoring systems have the distinct ability to capture violations by motor vehicles when they happen at dangerously close range to students, especially on state highways where the speed limits are higher than neighborhood streets. The great benefit of these programs is their ability to change behavior quickly and ensure that drivers exercise extreme caution when encountering a school bus. The civil fine accompanying these violations is a powerful mechanism to make sure residents abide by these laws.

A warning, without a civil fine, does not elicit the same response as when an actual penalty accompanies the violation. A first-time penalty is proven to drastically reduce recidivism rates immediately, advancing the true policy goal: safer roadways for students. *Waiting for a second violation before applying a penalty leaves the possibility open for hundreds of thousands of drivers to make the mistake again, which simply serves to multiply the danger that students experience in these environments.*

HB 849 would severely restrict the ability of counties to keep bus stops safe for Maryland's students. For this reason, MACo **OPPOSES** HB 849 and urges an **UNFAVORABLE** report.