

Judicial Proceedings Committee

Sen. William C. Smith Jr., Chair

Sen. Jeff Waldstreicher, Vice Chair

Wednesday, March 29, 2023

1:00 p.m.

Opposition HB849 - School Bus Stops - Violations - Enforcement and Safety Measures

Chair Smith, Vice-Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Maryland Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee:

I am writing to request your opposition to House Bill 849. If enacted, this legislation would threaten school bus safety, jeopardize pedestrian safety, and endanger students across the State of Maryland.

Whenever a motorist chooses to illegally drive around a stopped school bus, a child's life is put at risk. It's commonly known that distracted driving is on the rise. Motorists are texting while driving, speeding, and flaunting our traffic laws more than ever. School bus stop arm camera safety enforcement is a critical tool for changing reckless driving behavior around school buses. Now is not the time to weaken this crucial Maryland traffic safety law.

This legislation will have far-reaching negative impacts that are contrary to Maryland's Vision Zero initiative. It wrongly grants numerous reckless drivers a free pass for endangering students during the most vulnerable moments on the ride to and from school. It wrongly weakens student traffic safety programs by imposing a confusing unfunded mandate on Maryland communities. And most importantly, it wrongly reverses the progress Maryland communities have made in reducing illegal passings around stopped school buses.

This program already couples robust public education and enforcement. As a standard, community school bus safety programs feature ongoing multi-lingual public safety awareness campaigns. Still, equitable and comprehensive enforcement deters dangerous driving behavior. Without the ability to enforce school bus violations on all roads, our students – particularly our most vulnerable – will be more susceptible to being hit by a distracted driver without any consequences.

We have experienced numerous dangerous incidents in recent years, including the tragic death of a 7-year-old child in Montgomery County last year who lost his life when he was struck by a vehicle that failed to stop for a school bus with its red lights flashing. Sadly, this is not an isolated incident. In 2019, the NASDPTS illegal passing survey counted more than 6,000 school bus stop-arm violations in Maryland in one single day. This equates to more than one million stop-arm violations each school year – a crisis that we have finally begun to address.

Additionally, this legislation would impose harmful consequences on broader school safety. School officials regularly utilize safety technology on the school bus to respond to safety incidents, like bullying, fights, and other dangerous situations. School districts across Maryland depend on the school bus camera safety program to support additional safety features such as interior cameras, GPS, routing, and secure radio. In one instance in Montgomery County, a molestation case involving a child with special needs was solved based upon officials obtaining footage from school bus interior cameras. Without support from comprehensive school bus stop

arm safety camera programs, Maryland school districts would not benefit from these other essential safety technology tools.

The State Senate deserves credit for designing and implementing a school bus safety program that uses technology consistent with best practices to reduce the rate of illegal violations. To date, the data proves that enforcement not only helps reduce the number of illegal passings but ensures that most violators do not repeat the same offense again. Instead, HB 849 would seek to undermine these reductions and our overall efforts to improve traffic safety.

I respectfully ask that you oppose this bill to ensure that we can continue to make our roads safer and protect our children.

Sincerely,

Steve Randazzo
Executive Vice President
BusPatrol America LLC