



Serving Learners, Families, and the Community

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President, Board of Education

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Judicial Proceedings Committee
Sen. William C. Smith Jr., Chair
Sen. Jeff Waldstreicher, Vice Chair

Dear Senator Smith,

I am writing to you today to earnestly request your opposition to House Bill 849 (HB 849). As an educator, my primary responsibility is to make decisions that are in the best interests of all students. As a legislator, your primary responsibility is to propose and pass legislation that promotes order and safety. If enacted, HB 849 would threaten the safety of all school students, school bus drivers, and pedestrians throughout the state of Maryland.

Any motorist who chooses to illegally pass a stopped school bus is not only breaking the law, they are endangering the lives of children. Distracted driving has been, and continues to be, a problem in our modern society.. Motorists speed, drive aggressively, make phone calls, text, and send emails, all while driving. School bus stop arm camera safety enforcement is a critical tool in Cecil County for addressing reckless driving behavior around school buses.

HB 849 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 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.

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.

In closing, I again earnestly request that you oppose HB 849 as we work to ensure that our children can safely travel to and from school.

Sincerely,

Charles J. Helm, Ed.D
Director of Transportation