



PSSAM
Public School Superintendents' Association
OF MARYLAND

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BILL: HB 849
TITLE: School Bus Stops - Violations - Enforcement and Safety Measures
DATE: March 29, 2023
POSITION: Oppose
COMMITTEE: Judicial Proceedings
CONTACT: Mary Pat Fannon, Executive Director, PSSAM

The Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland (PSSAM), on behalf of all twenty-four public school superintendents, **opposes** House Bill 849.

House Bill 849 would require a law enforcement agency to issue a warning for certain traffic violations caught through school bus monitoring cameras. Additionally, this bill requires the State Highway Administration to develop a certain plan for improved safety measures at certain school bus stops in Montgomery County and to report its findings to certain persons on or before December 31, 2023.

Maryland's superintendents champion student safety when students are under the care of school personnel, including during their transport to and from school. Maryland's Code makes it very clear that in the absence of a physical median, motorists are required to stop when approaching a stopped school bus, regardless of the number of lanes separating the vehicles.

PSSAM is very concerned that allowing motor vehicle operators a first time warning when violating school bus traffic laws negates the severity of the potential danger they are posing to students. Motorists must be aware of their surroundings and anticipate that school children may be crossing the street in any direction when getting on and off a school bus to avoid causing students serious injury and death. Stop arm cameras on school buses are intended to further reinforce for drivers the importance of protecting our children by providing consistent penalties intended and proven to increase driver compliance. It is proven that associating a steep fine with such a dangerous traffic violation significantly decreases the chance that the driver will commit that violation again, which ultimately makes our roads safer.

Additionally, many vendors who provide these school bus stop arm cameras contract with school systems to provide other services, such as cameras inside school buses, GPS equipment, and other technology with little to no upfront costs. This bill jeopardizes many systems' relationship with their vendors, potentially disallowing access to these valuable tools that ensure student safety on and off the bus.

Giving a warning to a school bus stop arm violator before instating penalties goes against all identified school bus safety best practices, including the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) recommendations that promote increasing education and enforcement. In order to best ensure the safety of all students on their way to and from schools, we must reinforce the severity of the potential consequences of not stopping for a school bus, which include serious injury and even death.

For these reasons, PSSAM **opposes** House Bill 849 and requests an unfavorable report.