



HB101: State Highway Projects and Utility Compliance **Montgomery County Families for Safe Streets – FAVORABLE** **February 15, 2024**

Montgomery County Families for Safe Streets (MoCo FSS) supports HB101, to ensure that utility work doesn't delay State highway projects.

Our State highways are not only conduits for cars and people – there are often utilities and infrastructure (like poles, wires, lines, and pipes) alongside of, underneath, and above our State highway corridors. When the State decides to install a new traffic control device, signal, crosswalk, or bike lane, these utilities often need to be changed or moved to complete the project. There are multiple steps and hurdles in the existing process of installing a State highway project, involving a complex requesting, permitting, approving, and designing a new traffic control device or other infrastructure changes. In addition to this lengthy process, there is an additional process requiring the State Highway Administration to request that the utility owner or provider perform utility work. However, there is NO requirement that the utility provider to provide a timeline for completion, nor is there any incentive to move quickly. Furthermore, utility delays result in significant costs to the Transportation Trust Fund, at a time that the fund is cutting projects due to budget constraints.

If you've ever requested a traffic signal or other infrastructure-based safety improvement along a State highway, you'll understand just how long these delays can drag on. I've personally requested the installation of several traffic control devices, in areas where vulnerable road users are at great risk. In my experience, in nearly every instance it has taken over 5 years for a traffic signal to be installed. And, this estimate does not even account for utility delays. In one instance, along the Georgia Avenue corridor (MD97) at the intersection of Georgia and Price, a complex web of water, electric, and WMATA utilities have complicated and delayed the installation of a signal at the heart of Wheaton's urban core. Pedestrians are forced to cross at an unprotected crosswalk to get to the Metro, the bus stop, the grocery store, and other amenities. This traffic signal was requested over 5 years ago.

In 2023 there were over 590 traffic fatalities in the State of Maryland. How long must my community and other communities wait for these basic crash-prevention and life-saving solutions? Delays in installing traffic safety infrastructure are unacceptable and untenable – and, we must hold our utility providers and our traffic agencies accountable to timely solutions. This bill would help to do this, by requiring utility providers to provide a plan and a timeline, and regulations and penalties requiring these providers to stick to that timeline. These requirements would move our state in the right direction toward realization of the State's Vision Zero goal of ending roadway fatalities and serious injuries by 2030.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Kristy Daphnis, Executive Steering Committee, Montgomery County Families for Safe Streets