



EDUCATION, ENERGY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

SB 200: Counties – Construction of Sidewalks and Crosswalks – Safe Alternative Routes to Public Schools February 7, 2024 Position: Support

The Arc Maryland is a statewide advocacy and service organization that works to protect and advance the rights and quality of life of people with disabilities.

We support SB 200 as we believe that students of all abilities should have access to safe and accessible routes to school, and those routes should be posted by schools, available to families for practice with their children, prior to each school year.

This past school year, in Howard County in particular, the beginning of the school year bus transportation was abysmal. Students were either not picked up or were picked up but returned home hours later than expected. While this problem is mostly resolved, it illustrated the overreliance we have on school provided transportation.ⁱ Some students absolutely need bus transportation to attend school, either as a part of their Individualized Education Program or because of their proximity to school, but there are many students who would and could walk or independently travel to school if they had access to, and knowledge of, safe and accessible routes to school.

In community master plans for the creation of safe, alternative routes to school, we hope there is a considerate lens on accessibility of those routes. Accessible routes bring communities together and can be used by all: students in wheelchairs, students who have difficulty walking with terrain un-evenness, and families with children in strollers.

The United States Department of Transportation has several helpful resources in the Safe Routes to School Program Guide.ⁱⁱ Their website includes information on the health and environmental benefits of creating safe routes to schools. As we look to the future, reducing reliance on vehicles as a part of our clean air approaches, and promoting more active community design for overall health and wellness, this bill makes sense. We encourage a favorable report from the committee on SB 200.

For more information, please contact:

Ande Kolp, Executive Director, The Arc Maryland akolp@thearcmd.org

ⁱ <https://www.wypr.org/the-baltimore-banner/2023-11-27/inside-howard-countys-school-bus-crisis-everything-that-went-wrong-before-zums-launch>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.transportation.gov/mission/health/Safe-Routes-to-School-Programs>