



Maryland Youth Advisory Council
c/o Governor's Office of Crime
Prevention, Youth, and Victim Services
100 Community Place,
Crownsville, MD 21032

Grace Minakowski, *Chair*
Will O'Donnell, *Vice-Chair*
Folashade Epebinu, *Secretary*

February 7, 2024

Re: SB 200 | Counties - Construction of Sidewalks and Crosswalks - Safe Alternative Routes to Public Schools

Dear Chair Feldman and Members of the Education, Energy, and Environment Committee,

The Maryland Youth Advisory Council prides itself on being a coalition of diverse young advocates and leaders who serve as a voice for youth in the state of Maryland. As leaders in our communities, and as appointees of the Governor, President of the Senate, Speaker of the House, Maryland Association of Student Councils, Maryland Higher Education Commission and the University System of Maryland, we take every opportunity to address relevant issues by influencing legislation, spreading public awareness and serving as a liaison between youth and policymakers regarding issues facing youth.

Students in Maryland have the right to arrive safely to their schools, regardless of where they live. For students in rural or remote areas, access to transportation can be unreliable, hindering said students from reaching their full academic potential. As a result, many families must look to alternative transportation routes when getting their children to school—disproportionately affecting low-income families.¹ When considering the risk of pedestrian fatality, it is critical that Maryland communities are designed with adequate sidewalks, footpaths, and bike lanes in which students are not at risk of being injured. Research shows that accidents and fatalities regarding students traveling to school are higher than ever, with approximately 800 school-age children dying each year, and over 150,000 being injured during school-time travel.² In addition, utilizing safe, non-road paths instead of a car or bus can improve the physical health of students choosing to walk/cycle, as well as having positive impacts on the environment.³

SB 200 requires each county board of education to identify accessible pathways for students to travel to school via safe alternative paths including; sidewalks, footpaths, crosswalks, and bike paths. These pathways are intended for students assigned to a public school and located in an area that is ineligible for transportation services. The pathways report will also include requests to construct new safe routes, and

¹“2009 Poverty Status of Selected Groups.” 2014. Federal Highway Administration.
<https://nhts.ornl.gov/briefs/PovertyBrief.pdf>.

²“The Relative Risks of School Travel: A National Perspective and Guidance for Local Community Risk Assessment | Blurbs New | Blurbs | Main.” 2014. www.trb.org. Transportation Research Board. February 30, 2014.
<https://www.trb.org/Main/Blurbs/161028.aspx>.

³ Perno, Joseph. 2023. “The Advantages of Walking to School.” www.hopkinsmedicine.org. Johns Hopkins Medicine. April 28, 2023.
<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/wellness-and-prevention/the-advantages-of-walking-to-school>.

the county governing body shall develop a plan to meet the needs identified in board reports. The Council supports **SB 200**, as it aligns with the Council's Legislative Platform supporting:

- a. Advocating for proactive measures that the safety of youth and students (Article IV. Health And Social Issues; Clause F), and;
- b. Supporting initiatives designed to promote the physical and social well-being of Maryland Youth (Article IV. Health And Social Issues; Clause P).

SB 200 represents a pivotal step towards ensuring the safety and well-being of Maryland's students, embodying a commitment made by the general assembly, demonstrated through previous legislation, to foster environments where youth can thrive academically and physically. By pushing for the development of healthier, sustainable, inclusive, and safer communities, we support the educational journey of every student of Maryland, while at the same time protecting their futures. For these reasons, the Council supports **SB 200** and respectfully requests a favorable report from the committee. We thank you for your consideration of our position.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G. Minakowski', written in a cursive style.

Grace Minakowski, Chair
Maryland Youth Advisory Council