

HB 511: Vehicle Laws - Bicycles - Operation at Intersections  
House Environment and Transportation Committee  
Brendan Wray - FAVORABLE

February 15, 2024

Chair Korman and Committee Members,

I am in support of HB0511 - Vehicle Laws - Bicycles - Operation at Intersections. Roadway safety for all users is a paramount transportation concern. HB 511 would make Maryland's roadways safer for bicyclists, a critical portion of users that Maryland should seek to grow to reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT) if Maryland is to achieve Governor Moore's goals to reduce carbon emissions by 60 percent from 2006 levels by 2031.

Intersections are particularly dangerous for bicyclists. 54.5% of bicyclist injuries occur at intersections, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Bicyclists are at risk of being rear-ended when stationary, 'right hooked' by turning vehicles, or sideswiped by vehicles accelerating past them after a stop. These risks are exacerbated for women such as my wife, a bike commuter to the University of Maryland, and parents towing bike trailers with children, who take longer to accelerate from a stop. Allowing bicycle safety stops via HB 511 would reduce these threats.

So far, eight states and the District of Columbia have adopted the Bicycle Safety Stop, including Delaware, where reported crashes at intersections involving bicycles dropped 23% in the 30 months after the change. Maryland should join them.

Opponents say that road laws designed for cars should apply to bicyclists. In Maryland, they currently do. But there's a difference between a bike and a car or truck. Bicyclists are far more vulnerable than drivers. Allowing a bicyclist to keep rolling lessens the time they are exposed in an intersection and, not incidentally, delaying traffic. Additionally, there is no evidence showing bicyclist stop-as-yield laws have increased bike conflicts with other bikes or pedestrians. Bicycling becomes faster and more convenient, which in turn will encourage ridership. Drivers – and our environment, since biking is green – will share the benefit.

Finally, a Bicycle Safety Stop law has racial-justice implications. Failure to stop is currently grounds for a traffic citation, and we must acknowledge the gaping racial disparities in traffic enforcement, including here in Maryland. The stats I will cite are from other areas, however. A 2015 report revealed that 73% of Tampa bicycle stops involved Black bicyclists, in a city that is only 26% Black. In Seattle, Black bicyclists were cited for helmet infractions 4 times as often as White bicyclists, prompting backlash and repeal of the longstanding law. Allowing bicycle safety stops – removing one potential pretext for police interaction – will mean safer and more welcoming streets for Maryland's Black bicyclists.

I urge a Favorable HB 511 committee report and House of Delegates floor vote.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this legislation.

Brendan Wray  
College Park, MD