



HB 511: Vehicle Laws - Bicycles - Operation at Intersections
House Environment and Transportation Committee
Washington Area Bicyclist Association – FAVORABLE

February 15, 2024

Chair Korman and Committee Members,

Roadway safety is a paramount transportation concern. HB 511 would make Maryland's roadways safer for bicyclists. The Washington Area Bicyclist Association (WABA), an advocacy organization with 1,200 Maryland members, supports the bill.

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. Allowing a cyclist to proceed through a Stop sign without stopping, however yielding to pedestrians and to vehicles that have the intersection right of way – what proponents call Bicycle Safety Yield – will reduce these threats, creating safer intersections and easing traffic flow for all road users.

So far, eleven states and the District of Columbia have adopted Bicycle Safety Yield, 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 motor vehicles 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 delaying other traffic. 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, Bicycle Safety Yield has racial-justice implications. Failure to stop is currently grounds for a traffic citation, and we recognize 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.

WABA urges a Favorable HB 511 committee report and House of Delegates floor vote.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this legislation.

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