



## Senate Bill 526

### *Counties - Construction of Sidewalks and Crosswalks - Safe Alternative Routes to Public Schools*

MACo Position: **OPPOSE**

To: Education, Energy, and the Environment  
Committee

Date: February 12, 2025

From: Sarah Sample

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **OPPOSES** SB 526. While well-intentioned, this bill would place a costly mandate on county governments to carry out new state policies to create sidewalks and crosswalks as alternative routes for all public-school students. **MACo does not raise policy objections to the bill's goal of ensuring safe routes for students – county concerns are merely practical and cost-driven.**

As a rule, MACo resists state policies that result in costly or burdensome local implementation. SB 526 would implement a costly, logistically difficult mandate for counties to implement. The prior year fiscal notes highlighted several counties in which this proposal would be extremely costly to execute. That feedback highlights construction and renovation costs rising to multiple millions of dollars. Others anticipate the need to purchase additional buses and hire bus drivers to meet the requirements of the bill. Redistricting is also an acknowledged means to compliance in the bill, which is a significant barrier to cross in order to comply – and notably, county government lacks the ability to make such changes.

Additionally, the route to school may not be subject to just the jurisdiction of the county, as municipal or State-owned roadways may compose part, or even all, of the route. This bill unfairly requires counties to develop a plan with the controller of the road and re-direct county resources to construct sidewalks and crosswalks on roads not owned by the county. This is all while there is no obligation for the State to participate in the mandate or renovations when their highways are implicated by the study.

Furthermore, the one-size-fits-all mandate of SB 526 simply does not fit the transportation and geographic realities of Maryland counties. Counties – and schools – face diverse geographic challenges, transportation laws (like rights-of-way), and community characteristics that would make it difficult, if not impossible, to apply SB 526 to all 24 jurisdictions. Under state law, counties would have no choice but to fund the significant costs associated with SB 526 – competing for limited local funds against education, school construction, public safety, and other essential public services.

Counties agree with the intent of SB 526 and that the information it seeks to collect is important in understanding the needs of Maryland students, but this legislation goes too far in mandating county resources of an unknown amount, all while neglecting the logistical capacities of counties to implement it. For this reason, MACo **OPPOSES** SB 526 and urges an **UNFAVORABLE** report.