



HB0493 - Public Schools – Commemorative Day – Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day - Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee

FAVORABLE

March 18, 2025

Dear Chair Feldman and Committee Members,

I am writing in strong favor of HB0493 which would designate November 14th as Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day in Maryland. I am supporting this bill as a Maryland resident, and on behalf of my workplace, the Safe Routes Partnership. I was born and raised in Columbia and am a proud graduate of Howard County Public Schools. As a child growing up in Columbia, I had the privilege of being a part of a diverse, multicultural community, living in walkable neighborhoods, and receiving a top-tier public school education. Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day did not exist when I was growing up, but I see how my experiences align with the goals of this event, which are to inspire constructive dialogue around anti-racism and kindness, to encourage students to walk and roll to school, and to honor the living legacy of Ruby Bridges and her impact on education and civil rights. By officially recognizing November 14th as Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day, we can show that Maryland continues to be a great place for students to live, play, and learn.

Currently, I am a Senior Program and Engagement Manager at the Safe Routes Partnership, a national organization that works to make it safer and easier for people to walk, bike, and roll to community destinations like schools, parks, grocery stores, and libraries. In my role at the Partnership, I help communities develop and implement Safe Routes to School initiatives, including events like Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day. This past year, our organization awarded \$40,000 in grant funding to assist communities in organizing Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day celebrations. We awarded grants to 50 communities across the U.S. including two here in Maryland: Thomas Stone Elementary School in Mt. Rainier and Rolling Terrace Elementary School in Takoma Park. Over 1200 students participated in these two celebrations that included art activities, Ruby Bridges Read-Alouds, book displays, and community walks to school. One of the event organizers commented, "It was amazing we got to educate and promote to the school and community who learned about the Ruby Bridges story and how we can all be [a] hero and make an impact on the world we live in."

This funding is part of a larger initiative to grow the Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day movement. Each year on November 14th, hundreds of thousands of students across the country commemorate Ruby Bridges' historic act by walking, biking, and rolling to their school and discussing how they can make positive changes in their communities. In recent years, California and New Jersey have officially designated November 14th as Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day, demonstrating their commitment to inclusive, accessible streets, transportation safety, and education equity. Now, Maryland has the



opportunity to join California and New Jersey as national leaders in the Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day movement.

I strongly urge the Committee and the full Senate to pass HB0493 this legislative session. With the passage of this bill, Maryland can keep Ruby's legacy alive and empower the next generation of changemakers.

Thank you for your consideration!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kori Johnson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kori Johnson

Senior Manager, Program and Engagement

The Safe Routes Partnership