



THE PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY GOVERNMENT

OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

BILL: Senate Bill 526: Counties - Construction of Sidewalks and Crosswalks - Safe Alternative Routes to Public Schools

SPONSORS: Senators Arthur Ellis and Karen Lewis Young

HEARING DATE: February 12, 2025 1:00PM

COMMITTEE: Education, Energy, and the Environment

CONTACT: Intergovernmental Affairs Office, 301-780-8411

POSITION: INFORMATIONAL ONLY

The office of the Acting Prince George's County Executive presents to members of the committee this informational letter regarding **Senate Bill 526: Counties - Construction of Sidewalks and Crosswalks - Safe Alternative Routes to Public Schools**, requiring a county board of education each year to prepare and post to the county's website a report that identifies pathways that public school students, who are ineligible for transportation services, may use to travel to school using only safe alternative routes under certain circumstances; and, requiring the governing body of a county each year to review a certain report and construct any sidewalks and crosswalks necessary to create safe alternative routes for public school students under certain circumstances. A "safe alternative route" is defined to include (1) a road with sidewalks and, at intersections, crosswalks; (2) a foot path; and (3) a bike path. If the county governing body must alter a road that is not subject to the jurisdiction of the county to meet the bill's requirements, the governing body must develop a plan with the governmental entity or person that has control of the road and make reasonable efforts to execute the plan in an expeditious manner. As drafted, this proposal introduces possible risks and complications to ongoing local assessments, without removing existing barriers nor providing for a funding mechanism to fulfill the requirements of the legislation.

While Senate Bill 526 is in line with the goals of Vision Zero Prince George's: reaching zero crashes on roads within the county by 2040 and among other objectives providing a safe route to school for all students, the proposal is likely to interfere with ongoing local efforts to conduct holistic assessments and planning associated with the development process in Prince George's County, to include

pursuit of the necessary authorizations from the various stakeholders involved such as right-of-way acquisition, engineering studies for safety and stormwater management impacts, utility relocations, ADA accommodations being some of the most pressing. Specifically, today, Prince George's County Department of Public Works and Transportation is conducting a comprehensive countywide sidewalk inventory which will identify the quality of current facilities as well as where gaps in the network may exist. The inventory will also provide criteria for how best to prioritize future improvements. This critical information will provide the county with a valuable tool in helping to address and achieve many of the objectives of SB 526, rendering this proposal a duplicative and burdensome layer in this jurisdiction.

As you may be aware, Prince George's County has remained a vocal advocate to enhanced access, mobility and connectivity in a safe environment, which is why this administration is intimately familiar with the realities faced on the group in our jurisdiction. As such, this administration must raise very serious concerns regarding a requirement to construct sidewalks along county, municipal, state, and private roads as an unfunded mandate. The fiscal impact to the county's Department of Public Works and Transportation (DPW&T), Prince George's County Public School and the county will be significantly high. Further, DPW&T would be responsible for the construction of any sidewalks and crosswalks identified as necessary. The Maryland State Highway Administration (SHA) is responsible for building, providing access to, and maintaining state roadways. While construction of the sidewalks may be done by the State all the maintenance costs would be borne by the local government – thus exasperating the local financial impact. Further, the costs to the county's public school system associated with generating an actionable, annual report will be even more costly to the counties to then build and maintain these to items. Between the 2023 and 2024 fiscal notes for the respective year's version of this bill, several counties highlighted challenges in which this proposal would be extremely costly to execute.

While the County strongly supports the goals and intentions of this legislation, we do believe that this should be a shared responsibility at the federal state, county and municipal level and not place a singular burden of a costly unfunded mandate on Prince George's County in order to carry out state policies to create sidewalks and crosswalks as alternative routes for all public school students.