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HB 628 Highways - Sidewalks and Bicycle Pathways - Construction and Reconstruction
House Environmental and Transportation Committee
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FAVORABLE

Good afternoon, Chair Korman and Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee, my name is Priscilla Kania, and I am a Volunteer with AARP Maryland, representing our nearly 850,000 members statewide. On behalf of AARP, thank you for the opportunity to testify in strong support of **HB 628: Highways - Sidewalks and Bicycle Pathways - Construction and Reconstruction**. This important legislation directly aligns with AARP's Livable Communities initiative, which supports the development of communities where people of all ages can live safely, independently, and comfortably as they age. We thank Delegate Healey for sponsoring this critical legislation.

HB 628 requires the Maryland State Highway Administration to prioritize funding for the construction and reconstruction of sidewalks and bicycle pathways, particularly those adjacent to highways covered by Complete Streets policies or programs like Vision Zero. This measure is essential to ensuring that aging Marylanders can remain active, mobile, and connected to their communities.

Aging in Place: A Growing Necessity

As Maryland's population ages, ensuring safe and accessible infrastructure is crucial to allowing older residents to age in place. According to AARP research, nearly **90% of older adults** want to remain in their homes and communities as they age. However, this goal is only achievable if they have access to safe pedestrian and cycling infrastructure that meets their mobility needs. For older Marylanders, sidewalks and bike pathways are not just recreational amenities—they are lifelines that enable them to walk to the grocery store, visit their doctor, attend social events, and stay physically active. Accessible pathways reduce isolation and increase independence while improving physical and mental health.

The Link Between Safe Infrastructure and Healthy Aging

Accessible and well-maintained sidewalks and pathways are critical to preventing injuries, promoting active lifestyles, and improving quality of life for older adults. AARP's Livable Communities framework emphasizes the role of safe, walkable communities in reducing health risks such as:

- **Falls and injuries:** Uneven or poorly maintained sidewalks pose serious risks to older pedestrians.
- **Isolation and loneliness:** Lack of accessible pathways can lead to social isolation, which has been linked to negative health outcomes, including depression and cognitive decline.
- **Reduced physical activity:** Limited safe walking and biking options can discourage

older residents from engaging in the physical activity they need to maintain their health. By prioritizing funding for complete and connected sidewalks and bike pathways, **HB 628** directly addresses these challenges and fosters an environment where residents of all ages can thrive.

Complete Streets and Vision Zero: Safer Streets for All

Complete Streets and Vision Zero programs aim to design transportation networks that prioritize safety and accessibility for all users—whether they are pedestrians, cyclists, transit users, or drivers. By requiring the State Highway Administration to prioritize projects within these frameworks, **HB 628** ensures that future investments reflect a commitment to equity, safety, and long-term community sustainability.

Economic and Community Benefits

Investing in sidewalks and bicycle pathways doesn't just benefit individual residents—it strengthens entire communities by:

- **Increasing property values:** Walkable neighborhoods are highly desirable and can boost local property values.
- **Boosting local economies:** Safe, pedestrian-friendly areas attract more foot traffic to local businesses.
- **Reducing healthcare costs:** Encouraging physical activity through walkable communities can reduce the incidence of chronic diseases and associated healthcare costs.

HB 628 Supports Multigenerational Communities

Prioritizing infrastructure that promotes walking and biking benefits not only older adults but residents of all ages, including children, families, and individuals with disabilities. A truly livable community is one where everyone can navigate their environment safely and confidently. By passing **HB 628**, Maryland can take an important step toward ensuring that our infrastructure reflects the needs of a growing aging population and promotes healthy, connected communities.

AARP's Request

We respectfully urge the Committee to issue a **favorable report on HB 628** to help build safer, more accessible communities and support aging Marylanders in their desire to age in place.

Thank you for considering our testimony. For further questions, please contact Tammy Bresnahan, Senior Director of Advocacy of AARP Maryland at tbresnahan@aarp.org or at 410-302-8451. **Thank you!**