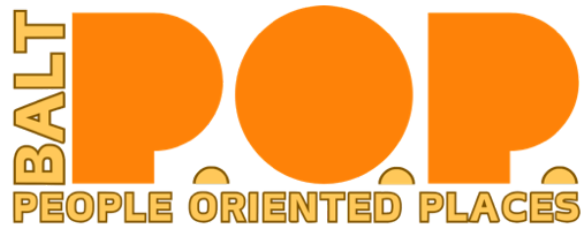


Bill: HB0234

Bill Title: Vehicle Laws - Injury or Death of Vulnerable Individual - Penalties

Position: **Favorable**



Members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee,

As a group which advocates for a built environment which is safe and convenient for all people, whether they are moving through that environment on foot, on a bicycle, in a wheelchair, via public transit, or in an automobile, we support HB0234.

Maryland's roadways are not safe, especially for vulnerable road users (VRUs). Despite the Vision Zero efforts of the past several years, those roadways have actually gotten less safe - for everyone.

Specific to the Baltimore region, the Baltimore Regional Transportation Board (BRTB), on an annual basis, tracks five performance/safety measures to carry out the Federal Highway Administration's Highway Safety Improvement Program. The last of those five measures is "Number of Non-motorized Fatalities & Serious Injuries". The numbers for this measure are abysmal.

The 2023 number for this measure was **410**, which is a **41% increase** over the 2005-2009 baseline number of **290**. The Maryland Department of Transportation's (MDOT's) current target for this measure is **294 by 2030**. [1] In terms of VRU deaths and serious injuries, MDOT is hoping to basically get us back to where we were 20 years ago. That's not progress - that's standing still.

**The vehicle speed at which a pedestrian has a 50/50 chance of suffering a serious injury is just 31 mph. They have the same odds of dying at 42 mph.** [2] We suspect that most drivers aren't aware of the life-changing/ending damage they are easily and effortlessly capable of inflicting - even at what they would probably consider to be relatively low speeds.

To be clear, we agree with Strong Towns that we need to move beyond our fixation on assigning blame for automobile crashes on drivers. [3] Our current go-to tools of driver education campaigns, shaming incorrect behaviors, levying fines, and (with this bill) threatening imprisonment aren't going to get us to where we really want to be (Vision Zero).

We need to, instead, focus on a) better roadway designs that compel slower speeds and safer driving and b) truly **deprioritize** high vehicle speeds and automobile flow over the safety of

VRUs. But, institutionalizing the crash analysis practices that Strong Towns has proven out will take time, as will the subsequent culture changes. Until then, we have to work within the parameters of the system we have today. In that light, we are in favor of this bill.

Whenever we find ourselves behind the wheel, we need to be fully aware of the harm we can inflict. Making imprisonment a possibility when striking a VRU who is lawfully making use of the roadway - whether they are in a crosswalk, in a bike lane, or (with this bill) on a sidewalk or shoulder - should help us all keep that awareness more top of mind.

We hope the committee finds these points helpful and convincing and we urge its members to **vote in favor of HB0234**. Thank you for your efforts and the opportunity for us to testify on this legislation.

[BaltPOP - Baltimoreans for People-Oriented Places](#)

References:

[1] "RESOLUTION #25-19 - ADOPTING HIGHWAY SAFETY TARGETS FOR THE BALTIMORE REGION". BRTB. January 2025.

<https://baltometro.org/sites/default/files/BRTBRes25-19.pdf>

[2] Tefft, B.C. "Impact Speed and a Pedestrian's Risk of Severe Injury or Death". AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety. September 2011.

<https://aaafoundation.org/impact-speed-pedestrians-risk-severe-injury-death/>

[3] Charles Marohn. "It's Time To Learn From Crashes and Create Safer Streets Today". October 30, 2024

<https://www.strongtowns.org/journal/2024/10/30/its-time-to-learn-from-crashes-and-create-safer-streets-today>