



**Board of Education
of Howard County**

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**Board of Education of Howard County
Testimony Submitted to the Maryland House of Delegates,
Environment and Transportation Committee
March 4, 2025**

HB0811: UNFAVORABLE

Counties – Construction of Sidewalks and Crosswalks – Safe Alternative Routes to Public Schools

The Board of Education of Howard County (the Board) opposes **Counties – Construction of Sidewalks and Crosswalks – Safe Alternative Routes to Public Schools** as an unfunded mandate that sets up requirements for the school system that are outside its jurisdiction.

HB0811 initially defines “safe alternative route” to include a road with sidewalks and crosswalks at intersections, a foot path, and a bike path. County boards must annually prepare and post a report that identifies areas of the county where students are ineligible for transportation services based on the distance between a residence and the school, and pathways these identified areas use to travel between the student’s residence and regularly assigned school using only a safe alternative route or a contiguous series of safe alternative routes. The bill further requires the county governing body to annually review the report above and construct any sidewalks and crosswalks necessary to create safe alternative routes for students as identified in the report.

Initially, the definition of “safe alternative route” does not address the use of neighborhood streets without sidewalks that in Howard County are reviewed and determined when safe for students to walk to school. If excluding those routes is intentional, the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) would likely have to re-review all walk routes to identify those that would be deemed unsafe with the passage of this bill. Where it results in routes deemed unsafe for students to walk, the school system may need to contract for additional buses given sidewalks/infrastructure are not immediately available or feasible. Walking routes in Howard County are reviewed by HCPSS staff, as well as Howard County Public Works and Complete Streets staff to ensure that the streets are safe for pedestrians or bikers.

While HCPSS currently produces walk zone maps, meeting the reporting provisions under HB0811 would require modifications using data on pedestrian infrastructure that HCPSS doesn’t have. Collaboration with the Howard County government would be required to produce the report, including obtaining the needed data and understanding its accuracy and limitations.

If it is determined there is a need to construct sidewalks or crosswalks to create safe alternative routes for students under HB0811, the costs would fall to the local county. However, there is potential concern that the school system would still realize a fiscal impact where county infrastructure improvements must be connected to school property. These also create additional maintenance burdens (such as additional surfaces that need snow cleared) that HCPSS Building Maintenance and Facilities Operations does not currently have the budget to support.

For these reasons, we urge an UNFAVORABLE report on HB0811 from this Committee.