

ALONZO T. WASHINGTON
Legislative District 22
Prince George's County

Finance Committee



James Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street, Room 314
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3155 · 301-858-3155
800-492-7122 Ext. 3155
Fax 410-841-3699 · 301-858-3699
Alonzo.Washington@senate.state.md.us

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

March 4, 2026

The Honorable Senator Brian J. Feldman, Chair
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
Maryland State Senate
Annapolis, Maryland

Re: SB526 – Establishment of Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day and Maryland School Pedestrian Awareness Day

Position: Favorable

Dear Chair Feldman and Members of the Committee:

I respectfully submit this testimony in support of Senate Bill 526, legislation that establishes an educational and commemorative Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day and a safety-focused Maryland School Pedestrian Awareness Day.

Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day commemorates one of the most significant moments in American civil rights history, the day in 1960 when a six-year-old girl walked through a hostile crowd to integrate an all-white New Orleans elementary school. That story is not just national history, but it is Maryland's history, rooted in the same legal legacy as Thurgood Marshall and *Brown v. Board of Education*. Designating November 14 as a formal observance connects that history to a living act: walking to school together. Simultaneously, pedestrian injuries and fatalities near Maryland schools continue to occur with no coordinated statewide response.

Maryland would join California, New Jersey, and Oregon in formally designating Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day, and Maryland would be the first state to have more than a ceremonial day and require an educational component with civil rights and social justice resources. Events like Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day help make students and their families safer, bring communities closer together, and help save lives.

As for pedestrian safety, the Children's Safety Network estimates that an average of 67, 124 child pedestrian injuries occur each year nationally. In Maryland, in November 2023, students Sky Sosa and Shalom Mbah were struck and killed by a van while crossing a crosswalk on their way to Riverdale Elementary School. Their deaths prompted the Prince George's County Council to establish a formal School Pedestrian Safety Workgroup in April 2024. Among its 18 final recommendations, the Workgroup explicitly called for establishing Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day (November 14) as an official County and PGCPs event.

This bill establishes two statewide observances within Maryland Public Schools, Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day (annually on November 14th) and Maryland School Pedestrian Awareness Day (second Wednesday in October). The legislation takes effect July 1, 2026, which allows ample time for coordination and voluntary local adoption. Resources would be provided by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), where resource development is centralized and voluntary for local adoption, limiting fiscal exposure. This bill also encourages leveraging existing safety grants and partnerships rather than creating new programs.

Ruby Bridges is in the curriculum, but anchored to nothing. Other holidays, like Veterans' Day and Lincoln's Birthday, are all codified in Maryland law. Creating a commemorative day for Ruby Bridges celebrates civil rights wins and Bridges as a key figure of the movement.

This bill does not require additional costs or resources. Any of the materials mentioned in the bill already exist and can easily be adapted to Maryland. This bill also does not undermine Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and avoids any specific mandates.

For these reasons, I respectfully request a favorable report on Senate Bill 526.

With Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alonzo T. Washington', written in a cursive style.

Alonzo T. Washington
Maryland State Senate
District 22