

Sen. Ellis Written Testimony SB0071.pdf

Uploaded by: Arthur Ellis

Position: FAV

ARTHUR ELLIS, CPA
Legislative District 28
Charles County

DEPUTY MAJORITY LEADER

Finance Committee

Vice Chair, Rules Committee

Senate Chair

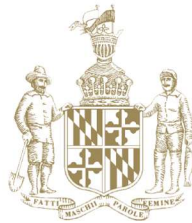
Joint Committee on the
Management of Public Funds

Senate Chair

Joint Committee on
Workers' Compensation Benefit and
Insurance Oversight

Senate Chair, Charles County Delegation

Chair, Select Committee Southern
Maryland



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
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Sponsor Written Testimony: Favorable

Senate Bill 0071: Education – Interjurisdictional Safe Pathways Commission – Establishment

February 2, 2026

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and esteemed members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

I am writing to express my strong support for Senate Bill 71, which would establish the Interjurisdictional Safe Pathways Commission to identify, coordinate, and secure funding for safe pathways for students traveling to and from school.

Students who do not qualify for transportation to and from school are required to walk; however, there is a lack of safe sidewalks and crosswalks for students to travel on. In Montgomery County, elementary and middle school students reported lack of sidewalks and crosswalks, excessive traffic speeds, and poor lighting. All of these conditions foster an unsafe environment for pedestrians to travel on, particularly students (Montgomery County of Transportation, 2025). This bill would establish the Interjurisdictional Safe Pathways Commission. The purpose of this commission is to guarantee that students are provided with a safe path to travel to school. The commission would conduct an inventory of the current safe pathways and identify what areas do not have safe pathways included. After identifying which communities are lacking safe sidewalks or crosswalks, the commission would develop strategic plans to secure funding and make the needed recommendations to local governments and state agencies to improve the environment for students. Throughout this process, the commission would include input from students, parents, and other stakeholders.

A significant number of students traveling to and from school are dependent on safe pathways. Students, parents, and other stakeholders are extremely disappointed in the

ARTHUR ELLIS, CPA
Legislative District 28
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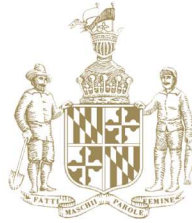
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unsafe circumstances these children are in (Montgomery County of Transportation, 2025). The Interjurisdictional Safe Pathways Commission would identify safe sidewalks or work to create them if they do not already exist. This commission would guarantee safer travel for all pedestrians, especially students.

I request a favorable report on Senate Bill 0071. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Arthur Ellis".

Arthur Ellis, CPA

References

Montgomery County Department of Transportation. (2025). *Safe Routes to School FY24 Glen Haven Elementary School safety audit* (Walkability Study). Montgomery County Government. https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/DOI-PedSafety/Resources/Files/Safe_Routes_to_School/WalkabilityStudy/Reports/SRTS_FY24_GlenHaven_ES_SafetyAudit.pdf

SB071 - Education - Interjurisdictional Safe Pathw

Uploaded by: Chris Parts

Position: FAV



February 2, 2026
Senator Brian Feldman
Chair, Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Letter of Support
SB 071 Interjurisdictional Safe Pathways Commission - Establishment

Dear Chair Feldman and Members of the Committee,

As a board member representing over 2,000 architects, on behalf of AIA Maryland, I write to express strong support of Senate Bill 071, which proposes establishing the Interjurisdictional Safe Pathways Commission to identify, coordinate, and secure funding for safe pathways for students traveling to and from school. AIA recognizes the value of quality planning and built environment, providing safe routes to school is a very important aspect of community planning and it needs to be carefully considered in the larger context of building effective communities. Additionally, from my personal experience, I recognize that being able to ride my bike to school for 7 years of primary education was a positive experience and an effective aspect of building stronger communities.

This bill requires the formation of a commission to inventory safe pathways to school, identify gaps, evaluate funding, develop a strategic plan, recommend policies, identify funding and foster engagement in planning/developing such pathways. Unfortunately, the vast majority of students in our public school systems arrive at school in a car or bus. Research review of a number of studies reflects on benefits from having safe routes to schools. A summary captured in "Active Living Research" summarizes information from several studies that indicate actively commuting to and from school could improve mental and physical health of students, it can lower transportation costs for school districts and families, and it can provide generational benefits extending well beyond those for students of primary school age.

Buildings can have a positive impact on health and wellness when planned properly, enabling formation of this commission may help us to think a little deeper before building anew, and assess communities for improvement for buildings in place. Thoughtful placement of buildings and walkable paths provide a greater percentage of the population with the ability to arrive at school of their own means, and this active living discourages sedentary lifestyles helping to establish healthy behaviors that are more likely to continue into adulthood.

AIA Maryland cares deeply about the quality of Maryland's built environment, particularly space that houses our future generations. It's important that we plan well and support schools that are healthy for the community and for the students. We therefore respectfully ask your committee to support SB071 that creates a commission aimed at understanding and making recommendations to develop Safe Pathways to Schools.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "C. Parts", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Chris Parts, AIA
Director, Past President, AIA Maryland

SB 71

Uploaded by: Timothy Meyer

Position: FAV

Testimony on SB0071 – Favorable

Education - Interjurisdictional Safe Pathways Commission - Establishment

Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee – February 4, 2026

EEE Committee and Members of the Maryland General Assembly,

I submit testimony as a former 5-term PTO president and longtime Safe Routes to School advocate to express **strong support of SB0071 – establishing an Interjurisdictional Safe Pathways Commission – and to request a FAVORABLE report from the committee.**

Last year, a [student was tragically killed in Montgomery County. In November 2023, two students were struck and killed walking to school in Prince George’s County.](#) Sadly, these were not isolated events. [The past decade has seen far too many school-related pedestrian safety incidents throughout Maryland.](#) And for every death or injury that makes the news, parents across Maryland [have countless examples of close calls where another tragedy was a split second or near-miss away.](#) Our kids can’t afford for us to wait until the next tragedy to take action on this issue.

I have seen firsthand how establishing a commission like SB0071 proposes can have a positive impact. After two students were killed in 2023, Prince George’s County Council established a School Pedestrian Safety Workgroup that met regularly for six months to [create a report with 18 detailed recommendations](#) to improve safety around our schools. The group brought together county and municipal leaders, school officials, public works and transportation officials, law enforcement, parents, and other key stakeholders. Our work was intended as a model for other counties and LEAs to adapt and adopt, and establishing a Safe Pathways commission statewide will help develop more solutions that keep Maryland students safe and create safer streets for all residents.

One additional insight to share: last year, Prince George’s County Public Schools hired two Safe Passage coordinators who have made an immediate impact and performed more than 100 safety assessments around the county so far. This relatively small investment in an LEA with 20,000+ employees has significantly elevated Safe Passage as a top priority and demonstrates how any additional focus on this issue can lead to measurable progress.

Every child has the right to get to and from school safely – and I thank Senator Ellis for raising awareness of this important issue and respectfully urge a FAVORABLE report on SB0071.

Timothy Meyer

*Former 5-term PTO president in Prince George’s County
Former member of the Prince George’s County School Pedestrian Safety Workgroup
Safe Routes and Walkable Schools Lead on the Prince George’s County Board of Education
Climate Change Action Plan Ad Hoc Committee*

SB71 - State Board & MSDE - LOI.docx.pdf

Uploaded by: Laurel Cratsley

Position: INFO

TO: Senate Committee on Education, Energy, and the Environment
BILL: Senate Bill 71 – Education - Interjurisdictional Safe Pathways Commission - Establishment
DATE: February 4, 2026
POSITION: Information

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) is providing this information for consideration regarding Senate Bill (SB) 71 – Education - Interjurisdictional Safe Pathways Commission - Establishment. This legislation would require MSDE to establish an Interjurisdictional Safe Pathways Commission within the Department.

For many years, identifying, coordinating, and securing funding for “safe pathways” for students traveling to and from school, such as sidewalks, crosswalks, bike lanes, pedestrian bridges, traffic-calming measures, and school zone signage, has been the responsibility of Local Education Agencies (LEAs), as they are best positioned to identify and address issues within their respective communities.

Under COMAR 13A.06.07.03, each local board of education has the authority to oversee the safe operation of its student transportation system, including establishing the “non-transported boundary” for each school. Students who reside within this boundary are not eligible for school-provided transportation and may walk, bike, use public transportation, or be transported by parents or guardians.

If a parent or student identifies an unsafe route, they may submit a request to the local transportation office for review. The office determines whether the route meets the criteria for unsafe conditions that warrant transportation services.

Tasks such as assessing existing routes, identifying gaps, developing strategic plans, pursuing funding (including public-private partnerships), and fostering community engagement are currently managed at the local level by each county and school system. These efforts require detailed knowledge of local road networks, traffic patterns, land use, and engineering standards, as well as close coordination with county and municipal transportation and public works agencies. MSDE does not currently possess the extensive engineering or local infrastructure expertise required for the successful implementation of a statewide commission and achievement of its intended goals.

Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Program:

This proposed bill intersects with ongoing efforts already being undertaken by MSDE, the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT), and LEAs through programs designed to improve safe routes to school and address transportation challenges in our communities.

One resource currently available to LEAs is the **Safe Routes to School (SRTS)** program, a collaborative effort between the State of Maryland, local jurisdictions, and LEAs.

The SRTS program, administered by the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) State Highway Administration, is federally funded and supports both infrastructure and non-infrastructure projects. Infrastructure investments include sidewalks, crosswalks, bike lanes, ADA curb ramps, traffic-calming measures, and signage near schools. Non-infrastructure efforts include education campaigns, walking school buses, traffic safety workshops, and outreach to students, parents, and law enforcement.

Funding requires a minimum 20% local match and is allocated through competitive grant cycles. Through this program, LEAs can work with local governments to identify and fund improvements to student travel routes.

The Interjurisdictional Safe Pathways Commission:

As outlined in SB 71, implementation of the Commission would necessitate a statewide effort to collect, compile, and maintain data from more than 1,400 schools to inventory existing safe pathway infrastructure. This scope of work would require the development and ongoing management of a comprehensive data system, as well as sustained coordination across multiple jurisdictions and agencies. In addition, the Department would need sufficient internal capacity to support commission coordination, stakeholder engagement, data analysis, and required reporting.

The proposed October 1, 2026, effective date presents operational challenges, particularly given the breadth of work required to stand up the Commission and initiate its activities. The first report is due December 1, 2026, which allows limited time to complete foundational tasks such as establishing membership, developing processes, and collecting meaningful data. These implementation considerations warrant careful evaluation to ensure feasibility, sustainability, and alignment.

SB 71 underscores the importance of student safety, a priority that MSDE shares with its LEA partners. However, the bill would place significant new responsibilities on the Department, despite the existence of established programs that already support safe student travel at the local level. Initiatives such as Safe Routes to School are designed to leverage local knowledge and interagency coordination, where understanding of community-specific infrastructure and needs is strongest.

MSDE recognizes that safe pathways for students remain a challenge in some Maryland communities. Current efforts led by MSDE, MDOT, and LEAs are actively addressing these concerns, and any new statewide initiative should build upon and complement these existing efforts.

The State Board and the Department respectfully request that you consider this information as you deliberate **SB 71**. For further details, please contact Laurel Cratsley, Interim Executive Director of Government Affairs, at 410-767-0906 or at laurel.cratsley@maryland.gov.

SB0071 - LOI - OATM - Education - Interjurisdictio

Uploaded by: Patricia Westervelt

Position: INFO



Wes Moore
Governor
Aruna Miller
Lieutenant Governor
Kathryn Thomson
Acting Secretary

February 4, 2026

The Honorable Brian J. Feldman
Chair, Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Letter of Information – Senate Bill 71 – Education – Interjurisdictional Safe Pathways Commission – Establishment

Dear Chair Feldman and Committee Members:

The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) takes no position on Senate Bill 71 and offers the following information for the Committee’s consideration.

Senate Bill 71 establishes the Interjurisdictional Safe Pathways Commission to identify, coordinate, and secure funding for safe pathways, including educational programs and policy initiatives, for students traveling to and from school. It requires that the Commission conduct an inventory of existing safe pathways, identify gaps in infrastructure and programs, evaluate funding needs and opportunities, recommend policies to local and state agencies, and foster community engagement with students, parents, and school personnel.

While MDOT concurs that these actions are essential to developing safe pathways to and from school across Maryland, MDOT believes that they are best suited to local coordinators who are highly knowledgeable about their schools’ communities and transportation needs and have local networks to disseminate information. The Committee should be aware that a growing network of coordinators already exists, and that it will have continued support by state agencies through the Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Working Group that was established in 2024.

SRTS is both a federal funding category under the Transportation Alternatives Program administered by the State Highway Administration (SHA) and a proven framework used nationally to improve student transportation safety. Led by MDOT, the SRTS State Agency Working Group aims to improve safety around schools, with a focus on K-12 students walking and biking to school, and includes representatives from MDOT, the State Highway Administration, the Maryland Motor Vehicle Administration, the Maryland Department of Planning, the Maryland Department of Health, and the Maryland State Department of Education.

The SRTS Working Group develops resources for SRTS coordinators to build local stakeholder groups, identify safe pathways, develop recommendations, and implement action plans at the school level, in partnership with local communities and their local education agency. A model

The Honorable Brian J. Feldman
Page Two

framework for local SRTS coordinators currently exists in Montgomery County. In 2025, following a yearlong evaluation of how SRTS funding is used in Maryland, MDOT launched a SRTS Coordinator Pilot awarding Transportation Alternatives grants to Baltimore City, Howard County, Anne Arundel County, and Prince George's County, joining Montgomery County and extending the reach of funding across the region. The MDOT SRTS Coordinator Pilot provides direct support and technical assistance to local coordinators to be hired starting in 2026.

The Maryland Department of Transportation respectfully requests the Committee consider this information during its deliberation of Senate Bill 71.

Respectfully submitted,

Matthew Mickler
Director of Government Affairs
Maryland Department of Transportation
410-865-1090

SB0071-EEE_MACo_LOI.pdf

Uploaded by: Sarah Sample

Position: INFO



Senate Bill 71

Education - Interjurisdictional Safe Pathways Commission - Establishment

MACo Position:

To: Education, Energy, and the Environment

LETTER OF INFORMATION

Date: February 4, 2026

From: Sarah Sample

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **takes NO POSITION** but offers a **LETTER OF INFORMATION** on SB 71. The goal of ensuring all students have safe pathways to and from school is commendable and a shared value of the counties. Identifying areas that may require improvements as well as funding to make those upgrades is a wise strategy. Counties look forward to being a necessary part of that discussion, along with other affected stakeholders, as outlined in the bill. To that end, MACo will raise here its continued concerns regarding both cost and legal jurisdiction.

MACo has previously opposed legislation to require counties to make the types of improvements that the commission in this bill seeks to study. While well-intentioned, that similar legislation would have placed a costly mandate on county governments to create sidewalks and crosswalks as alternative routes for all public school students. Counties are not in a financial position to singularly take on an unfunded mandate of this magnitude while managing the many other state cost shifts and requirements that have been levied on local governments to date.

If the outcome of the commission's work, as outlined in SB 71, implements a costly, logistically difficult mandate for counties to implement, it would likely meet similar resistance as prior legislation on the topic. The language of SB 71 is more encouraging than prior versions of this legislation because it requires the commission to look for alternative funding sources, rather than shifting the entire cost to a county. A collaborative approach that leverages all available resources will make it easier for a county to become a productive participant on a project, rather than one burdened by an unfunded mandate and limited local resources.

The fiscal notes on the other bills that have sought to produce a local report on, and mandated county remedies for, safe routes to school – SB 526 of 2026, SB 200 of 2025, SB 95 of 2024, and SB 65 of 2023 – are good examples of why counties have had reservations about this initiative over the years. That feedback highlights construction and renovation costs rising to multiple millions of dollars as well as transportation requirements that would affect school bus inventory and staff. Identifying viable funds will help counties avoid being put into a position where these projects end up competing for limited local funds against education, school construction, public safety, and other essential public services.

Additionally, it is useful context for the commission to appreciate that a route to school may not be subject to just the jurisdiction of the county, as municipal or state-owned roadways may compose part, or even all, of the route. In many cases, the most worrisome elements of the pedestrian pathway would be on or across roadways that the county government has no authority to improve. This means that the various versions of the bill that specify a mandate for county remedies would be impossible, as the State and municipal governments with legal responsibilities for those roads are not included. In the event that an improvement would be required on a road not owned by a county, the appropriate authority should be engaged to manage those potential projects or renovations.

Finally, MACo respectfully advises any potential commission to consider the diversity of Maryland counties in undertaking this type of work. Counties – and schools – have differing geographic challenges, transportation laws (like rights-of-way), and community characteristics. Maintaining local control and self-determination in development ensures that Maryland communities retain the atmosphere and authenticity that makes residents want to call it home.

Counties recognize the intent of SB 71 and believe the research it seeks to do is important in understanding the needs of Maryland students. Provided the outcome of that work effectively identifies alternative funding methods, engages the full range of affected stakeholders, and includes consideration outside of simply putting the operational and cost mandate on counties, it may prove to be useful and informative.