



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

HB 1491 – Education – Interjurisdictional Safe Pathways Commission Act

Testimony of Delegate Darrell Odom

March 12, 2026

Dear Chairman Korman, Vice Chairman Guyton, and Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee:

I am writing to express strong support for **House Bill 1491**, which establishes the **Interjurisdictional Safe Pathways Commission** to identify, coordinate, and secure funding for safe pathways for students traveling to and from school.

Across Maryland, many students rely on walking or biking to school but lack safe and accessible infrastructure. Gaps in sidewalks, crosswalks, bike lanes, traffic calming measures, and school zone signage create significant safety concerns for students and families. These challenges are particularly acute for students with disabilities and for communities where traffic volumes or roadway design create hazardous pedestrian conditions.

HB 1491 creates a collaborative statewide framework to address these challenges. The bill establishes the Interjurisdictional Safe Pathways Commission to bring together key stakeholders, including representatives from the Maryland State Department of Education, the Maryland Department of Transportation, the Maryland Department of Health, the Maryland Department of Disabilities, local school systems, parents, students, and infrastructure experts. Through this coordinated structure, the commission will work to identify gaps in safe routes to school and develop strategies to improve student travel safety across jurisdictions.

The commission will conduct a statewide inventory of existing safe pathway infrastructure and programs, identify areas where improvements are needed, and evaluate opportunities to leverage federal, State, local, and private funding streams. It will also develop a strategic plan to coordinate investments and recommend policies that maximize available resources while improving safety outcomes for students. These efforts will help ensure that Maryland takes a proactive and coordinated approach to improving safe routes to school.

Importantly, HB 1491 is designed to leverage existing resources and maximize funding opportunities. According to the fiscal and policy analysis, the Maryland State Department of Education will provide staff support for the commission, including a contractual coordinator and an initial assessment to

inventory safe pathways statewide. This assessment will help inform long-term planning and guide future infrastructure investments to improve student safety.

Improving safe routes to school is not simply a transportation issue—it is also a matter of public safety, equity, and public health. Safe pathways encourage walking and biking, support student attendance, and ensure that all students—including those with disabilities—can travel safely to school regardless of where they live.

By establishing a coordinated, interagency strategy to identify needs, align investments, and maximize available funding, HB 1491 represents an important step toward ensuring that every student in Maryland has a safe path to school.

For these reasons, I respectfully request a favorable report on House Bill 1491.

Thank you for your consideration.