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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB1421
TASK FORCE TO STUDY PEDESTRIAN AND BICYCLIST INJURIES AND FATALITIES

With the numbers of pedestrian and bicyclist injuries on an upward trend since 2020, House Bill 1421 proposes a Task Force to study what bike riders and walkers can do to reduce their own negligence which causes or contributes to these accidents.

We all have loved ones that enjoy taking off on a bicycle for a leisurely ride on a sunny day. Despite the recreational purpose, the dangers should not be ignored.

We are all walkers. We walk our dogs or stroll with our kids or grandkids in a neighborhood to and from the local playground or park. We park our car and walk to the venue for a street fair or a flea market or craft show. Whenever we do, we are at risk of injury or tragedy, especially if our activities keep us out after dark or there is a sudden weather change.

Recently, I was driving just after dusk in Harford County on a side road close to my home. Suddenly a bicyclist zipped by with no reflectors on his bike, wearing only dark clothing. This was not a well-thought-out action on his or her part, given the time of day and the road conditions.

In 2022, there was a 40-year peak nationwide in pedestrian deaths. In 2024, 31% of the accident fatalities in the District of Columbia, Virginia, and Maryland combined (102) were pedestrians and bicyclists. The "Street Smart" Safety Campaign, initiated in 2017 to reduce pedestrian and bicyclist injuries and deaths particularly in Montgomery and Prince George's County, supporting Vision Zero initiatives: The Maryland Highway Safety Office envisions Zero Deaths in Maryland. But the data all seems to be sparse after

2023 despite the reported upward trend in injuries and fatalities. We need to know more and do more.

On average, one Baltimore resident dies every week (2017 data) in a traffic-related accident; one Baltimore resident is injured in a traffic-related accident every hour! Two MICA (Maryland Institute College of Art) students decided that an intervention was in order. These two graduate students conceived the “Made You Look: Art in the Right of Way” to reduce the troubling statistics through art. The “combination of measures that reduce the negative effects of motor vehicle use, alter driver behavior and improve conditions for non-motorized street users” is recognized by the U.S. Department of Transportation. This traffic-calming artwork at crosswalks and sidewalk bump-outs alert drivers’ attention to pedestrians, bike-riders, and other non-motorized road users. They became known as Art in the Right of Way. Resonating with communities where tragedies have occurred, the Made You Look project took off and the stats show marked improvements with a 41% increase in drivers yielding to pedestrians.

We have a duty to increase public awareness and improve public safety. We need to find out more ways to do so and where it is most needed. The Task Force would be charged with just such a fact-finding mission. Let us gather the data, reach out to communities, and seek out information from educators and local leaders.

HB1421 is the mission. The Maryland General Assembly is the launchpad.

Please return a favorable report for HB1421.

Thank you, Chairman Korman and Committee Members.

Susan K. McComas