

HB1491 Safepathways Testimony 2026.pdf

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Position: FAV



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.

EllaSohn-HB1491.pdf

Uploaded by: Ella Sohn

Position: FAV

HB1491 Written Testimony - Environment and Transportation Committee (3/12 at 1:00 p.m.)

Education - Interjurisdictional Safe Pathways Commission - Establishment

Baltimore County Student Councils

Ella Sohn - Eastern Technical High School Student

Chair Korman, Vice Chair Guyton, and members of the Environment and Transportation Committee:

My name is Ella Sohn and I am a student from Baltimore County. I write to you on behalf of students in Maryland to request a favorable report on House Bill 1491.

For many students, transportation does not pose itself solely as a logistical issue, but as a systemic barrier that inhibits access to education. In the Baltimore County Public Schools system specifically, we have already seen a consistent disparity in funding for academic resources, transportation, and overall educational equity, which have contributed to our rates of absenteeism, which generates lower engagement in school content and thus has institutionally led to lower graduation rates. Research corroborates that unsafe commuting routes only further the inaccessibility of maintaining a high-quality education by contributing to absenteeism, while expanding safe routes to school leads to improved attendance and student well-being.

I have seen this issue firsthand, and have had peers suffer the consequences. Recently, Maryland experienced one of the largest winter storms in recent memory. When Baltimore County Public Schools reopened roughly a week later, many sidewalks and neighborhood roads remained covered in snow and ice. Students in my community had to walk in the street because sidewalks were still blocked, while others tried to walk on icy paths that had not been cleared. I remember watching some students walking precariously on 3-foot-tall mounds while on the bus to school. That should not be a problem that any student has to face just to complete the legal and educational obligation of attending school. BCPS stated that students could be excused for any weather-related absences, but that disallows students from being caught up with their schoolwork and overloads more tasks onto them.

House Bill 1491 addresses this gap by creating a statewide framework to identify resources, align agencies, and develop long-term solutions for safer school travel. By bringing stakeholders together and establishing a clear reporting structure, this commission would help ensure that infrastructure improvements are strategic, coordinated, and equitable.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 1491. Thank you for your time and consideration.

HB 1491, Favorable, Weiss.pdf

Uploaded by: Ron Weiss

Position: FAV

SUPPORT for HB 1491 - Education - Interjurisdictional Safe Pathways Commission - Establishment

Chair Korman, Vice Chair Guyton, and Members of the Committee:

I'm Ron Weiss, a resident of Fort Washington in Prince George's County. I strongly urge a favorable report on HB 1491.

HB 1491 addresses a basic public responsibility: making sure children can get to and from school safely. In Prince George's County, that responsibility is too often undermined by fragmentation. Students may not cross jurisdictional boundaries on their way to school, but the agencies responsible for sidewalks, crossings, road design, school access, disability access, and funding certainly do. When responsibility is scattered, dangerous gaps can remain in place for years. HB 1491 is a practical response to that problem.

Safe access to school requires coordination, and right now that coordination is often missing.

This issue is real in Fort Washington. For example, the sidewalks students use to walk to our new Colin Powell Academy are incomplete, forcing students onto Fort Washington Road at a time when traffic is heavy with commuters trying to get to work. That is not a minor inconvenience. It is a predictable safety failure.

HB 1491 recognizes that safe pathways are about more than school buildings. Safe routes to school depend on complete sidewalks, safe crossings, traffic calming, bike and pedestrian infrastructure, signage, and supportive policies and programs. In other words, this bill recognizes that student safety begins before a child reaches the school door.

For Prince George's County families, that is exactly what is needed: not another disconnected process, but a coordinated one with a specific mandate. This bill creates a framework for turning known hazards into identified priorities, funding strategies, and real improvements on the ground. Maryland should not wait for tragedy to force action where obvious risks already exist.

HB 1491 is a smart, targeted step toward safer school access for children across our state. I respectfully urge a favorable report.

Sincerely,

Ron Weiss

Fort Washington, Maryland

SaanRhyne-HB1491.pdf

Uploaded by: Saan Rhyne

Position: FAV

HB1491 Written Testimony - Environment and Transportation Committee (3/12 at 1:00 p.m.)

Education - Interjurisdictional Safe Pathways Commission - Establishment

Baltimore County Student Councils

Saan Rhyne - Eastern Technical High School Student

Chair Korman, Vice Chair Guyton, and members of the Environment and Transportation Committee:

My name is Saan Rhyne and I am a student from Baltimore County. I write to you on behalf of students in Maryland to request a favorable report on House Bill 1491.

House Bill 1491, crossfiled with Senate Bill 71, establishes a commission to identify, coordinate, and secure funding for safe walking and biking pathways for students traveling to and from school, and report annually to the Governor and specific legislative committees on funding opportunities discovered, recommendations for infrastructure improvements, and progress on coordinated safe route projects.

Transportation is one of the largest barriers to students attending school. When there are gaps in school transportation systems, students suffer and lose the ability to have a complete education. Dangerous commutes are directly linked to absenteeism, and studies show that expansion of safe routes to school lead to higher attendance rates.

Recently, Maryland faced one of the largest winter storms in recent years. The Baltimore County Public Schools system reopened schools approximately one week after the storm, when sidewalks and roads were still covered in snow. Many students were forced to walk on roads, or face sidewalks covered in snow and slick with ice. For over a week following the return to school, some of my peers and myself had to walk on Mace Avenue as part of getting to school, due to sidewalks being covered in snow and ice and being unsafe to walk on. We had to walk on the same road as trucks, cars driven by parents, and student drivers driving 30 miles per hour, or over. Around that same time period, a bus crash occurred in Essex, injuring 3 students. This is dangerous for students, drivers, and for school systems.

This bill establishes a roadmap for long-term statewide safety infrastructure by creating a coordinated, statewide strategy to address the dangers posed by travel routes to and from schools. Currently, responsibility for school travel falls across multiple jurisdictions: counties, municipalities, state agencies, and regional planners, which causes fragmented planning and inconsistent design. By filling the structural gap between jurisdictions, the bill will secure and streamline funding and planning processes.

All students deserve a safe route to school, regardless of where they live, what school or county they attend, and the weather conditions. Accordingly, I respectfully request a favorable report on HB1491 from the committee. Thank you for your time.

HB1491 Timothy Meyer Favorable Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Timothy Meyer

Position: FAV

Testimony on HB1491 – Favorable

Education - Interjurisdictional Safe Pathways Commission - Establishment

Environment and Transportation Committee – March 12, 2026

Environment and Transportation 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 HB1491 – 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 HB1491 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 Delegate Odom and all the co-sponsors of this legislation for raising awareness of this important issue. I respectfully urge a FAVORABLE report on HB1491.

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*

HB1491 - LOI - OATM - Education - Interjurisdiction

Uploaded by: Patricia Westervelt

Position: INFO



Wes Moore
Governor
Aruna Miller
Lieutenant Governor
Kathryn Thomson
Acting Secretary

March 12, 2026

The Honorable Marc Korman
Chair, Environment and Transportation Committee
250 Lowe House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Letter of Information – House Bill 1491 – Education – Interjurisdictional Safe Pathways Commission – Establishment

Dear Chair Smith and Committee Members:

The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) takes no position on House Bill 1491 and offers the following information for the Committee’s consideration.

HB 1491 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 Marc Korman
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 House Bill 1491.

Respectfully submitted,

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

HB1491-ET_MACo_LOI.pdf

Uploaded by: Sarah Sample

Position: INFO



House Bill 1491

Education - Interjurisdictional Safe Pathways Commission - Establishment

MACo Position:

LETTER OF INFORMATION

Date: March 12, 2026

To: Environment and Transportation
Committee

From: Sarah Sample

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) takes **NO POSITION** but offers a **LETTER OF INFORMATION** on HB 1491. 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 HB 1491, 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 HB 1491 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 HB 1491 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.

HB 1491 - State Board & MSDE - LOI.docx.pdf

Uploaded by: Stefan Redding-Lallinger

Position: INFO

TO: House Committee on Environment and Transportation
BILL: House Bill 1491 – Education - Interjurisdictional Safe Pathways Commission - Establishment
DATE: March 12, 2026
POSITION: Information

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) is providing this information for consideration regarding House Bill (HB) 1491 – 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 HB 1491, 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.

HB 1491 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 **HB 1491**. For further details, please contact Laurel Cratsley, Interim Executive Director of Government Affairs, at 410-767-0906 or at laurel.cratsley@maryland.gov.