



HB394 Counties- Construction of Sidewalks and Crosswalks – Safe Alternative Routes to Public Schools

Position: Favorable

February 12, 2026

The Maryland Alliance for Racial Equity in Education (MAREE), a coalition of education advocacy, civil rights, and community-based organizations committed to eliminating racial disparities in Maryland's education system, **offers favorable testimony in support of HB394 Counties – Construction of Sidewalks and Crosswalks – Safe Alternative Routes to Public Schools.**

House Bill 394 would require county boards of education to identify safe alternative routes to schools and require county governing bodies to construct necessary sidewalks and crosswalks to ensure students can safely walk to school.

EQUITY AND ACCESS TO EDUCATION

Access to education begins with the ability to safely reach school. Currently, students who live outside transportation eligibility zones but lack safe walking infrastructure face an impossible choice: navigate dangerous routes without sidewalks or crosswalks, or miss school entirely. This disproportionately impacts families without access to personal vehicles and creates barriers to consistent school attendance.

House Bill 394 directly addresses this equity gap by mandating that counties systematically identify areas where students are ineligible for transportation and then construct the infrastructure necessary to ensure safe passage. This transforms walking to school from a hazardous endeavor into a viable, healthy option for thousands of Maryland students.

STUDENT SAFETY AS A FUNDAMENTAL PRIORITY

The safety implications of this bill cannot be overstated. Each year, pedestrian injuries and fatalities occur when children are forced to walk along roads without sidewalks or cross busy intersections without marked crosswalks. By requiring counties to assess pathways and build necessary infrastructure, HB 394 creates a systematic, preventative approach to student safety rather than a reactive one.

The bill's comprehensive definition of "safe alternative routes" – including sidewalks, crosswalks, foot paths, and bike paths – acknowledges the diverse environments across Maryland counties and provides flexibility while maintaining high safety standards.

ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY

HB 394's requirement that county boards of education post annual reports to their websites ensures transparency and accountability. Parents, community members, and advocates will be able to see exactly where gaps in safe infrastructure exist and track progress toward addressing them. This public reporting

mechanism empowers communities to engage meaningfully in school safety planning.

REMOVING BARRIERS TO ATTENDANCE

Regular school attendance is foundational to academic success, yet unsafe routes to school serve as a hidden barrier for many students. When families fear for their children's safety during the walk to school, attendance suffers. By eliminating this barrier, HB 394 supports improved attendance rates, which particularly benefits students in communities that have historically faced disinvestment in infrastructure.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL COORDINATION

The bill thoughtfully addresses situations where roads fall under state or other jurisdictions through its requirement for collaborative planning and reasonable efforts toward execution. This ensures that jurisdictional complexity does not become an excuse for inaction while recognizing practical limitations. While constructing sidewalks and crosswalks requires investment, the returns – in student safety, improved attendance, better health outcomes, and educational equity – far outweigh the costs. Moreover, this infrastructure benefits entire communities, not just students, by creating safer, more walkable neighborhoods.

House Bill 394 represents a commitment to ensuring that every Maryland student can safely reach their school, regardless of where they live or their family's access to transportation. It addresses a fundamental equity issue in education while promoting student safety, health, and consistent attendance.

MAREE urges a favorable report on House Bill 394.

peace & truth,
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