

THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony in Support of HB973  
Pedestrian Safety Act of 2020

Testimony by Delegate Vaughn Stewart  
February 27, 2020 • Environment and Transportation Committee

Pedestrian Crashes in Maryland

Each year in Maryland, around 3,000 pedestrians are injured, and about 100 die. In the most populous jurisdictions in the state, at least one pedestrian is injured every day. Many of these crashes occur on state roads, and most of them can be attributed to roads that are not designed for people using their feet for transportation.

These crashes are not distributed equally across all demographics, but instead disproportionately affect the most vulnerable Marylanders. Low-income communities experience twice as many pedestrian fatalities as more affluent communities. And in Maryland, the vast majority of victims are children, the elderly, the disabled, or people of color.

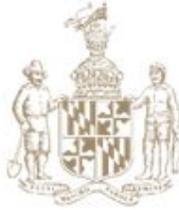
What the Bill Does

**HB973 will raise the minimum fine for driving offenses related to pedestrian safety, and allot the increase to the Pedestrian Safety Fund that we created last year.** This bill would also require the state to prioritize use of the funds in locations near schools and school bus stops. The current minimum fine for failing to stop for a pedestrian in a crosswalk is \$80, which is among the lowest in the country. An \$80 minimum is inconsistent with how we treat other offenses, many of which involve less reckless behavior yet carry higher fines. For example, driving a motor vehicle while ill or fatigued carries a fine of \$290.

Fines for the following offenses would also be increased: driver passing vehicle stopped for pedestrian at crosswalk (from \$50 to \$100), driver failure to yield to blind or deaf pedestrian with guide dog (from \$70 to \$150), driver failure to yield the right-of-way to pedestrian/bicycle after green arrow signal (from \$90 to \$150), driver failure to yield intersection right-of-way to pedestrian/bicycle after turn on red signal (from \$90 to \$150), and driver failure to exercise due care to avoid pedestrian collision (from \$70 to \$150).

VAUGHN STEWART  
Legislative District 19  
Montgomery County

Environment and Transportation  
Committee  
*Subcommittees*  
Environment  
Land Use and Ethics



The Maryland House of Delegates  
6 Bladen Street, Room 220  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401  
410-841-3528 · 301-858-3528  
800-492-7122 Ext. 3528  
Vaughn.Stewart@house.state.md.us

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The Fund pays for structural fixes to state roads to make them safer, including sidewalks, curb extensions, bike lanes, lane narrowing, signaling, crosswalks, and HAWK beacons. It also finances educational initiatives designed to teach both pedestrians and drivers about their rights and responsibilities.

Why the Committee Should Vote Favorably

Maryland pedestrians are injured everyday due to unsafe driving and roads designed for cars rather than people. We must build on our work last year to make our roads safe for people who use their feet to get around. Research indicates that increasing fines can influence driver behavior. Additionally, design changes to roads are a proven way to reduce both the likelihood and impact of crashes, which will ultimately save lives. Increasing fines will encourage pedestrian-friendly driving, and prioritizing projects near schools and school bus stops will protect kids who walk to school or the bus. Walking improves public health, reduces harmful emissions, and curbs traffic congestion. Every resident of our state—including the elderly, the young, and the poor—should feel safe when they walk.

For the above reasons, I urge a favorable report.