

BALTIMORE CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Brandon M. Scott
Mayor, City of Baltimore

Linda Chinnia
Chair, Baltimore City Board
of School Commissioners

Dr. Sonja Brookins Santelises
Chief Executive Officer

**Testimony of the
Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners
In Opposition of
House Bill 487
Education – School Construction -Pedestrians Safety Plans
(School Pedestrian Safety Act)**

March 18, 2021

The Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners understands the concerns that the sponsor brings forth in this bill. However, this bill is costly and challenging for a high density urban area, such as Baltimore City.

If a pedestrian safety plans are added as part of an architect/engineer's formal submission package, the cost would easily increase depending on the size of the property and the surrounding school zone since the work may encompass sidewalks, drainage, ADA access, signage, trees, and possibly lighting. This then requires professional engagement and other services which would include a civil engineer, landscape architect, architect, safety inspector; the internal engagement and enrollment teams; other external partners like DOT, Planning, and others.

One of the district's most significant challenges with the bill is that it is asking for non-school property spaces to be evaluated and potentially improved. Sidewalks beyond our sites and roads are typically not within the allowable fund expenditures because they are not school property. This means many other public agencies (DOT, Dept of Planning, DPW, etc.) would have to be involved, and the bill doesn't specify how those entities would have to partner with the school district to construct a cohesive plan.

In addition, because school designers typically do not have traffic study experience, other consultants would have to be engaged. This could increase the design fees, which could increase exponentially based on the size of the site. We estimate this to be in the order of \$40,000 for an average site in the City. This would create a significant civil engineering component to the projects. Considering the public hearing requirement, there is a cost implication there as well.

Finally, City Schools questions the ability for a high density urban area to even be able to do the items indicated. The current "Safe Routes to School Program" being managed by Inspire in Baltimore City focuses on improving the neighborhood within a quarter mile of the school, to create a safe route for students (not passing abandoned houses, dangerous situations, etc.). The legislation discusses sidewalk infrastructure, for example. While, perhaps, some of the sidewalks may need repair, in our urban area, many of the sidewalks go from property line to curb line. There is no way to expand that infrastructure.

For the foregoing reasons, the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners urges an unfavorable report.

Dawana Merritt Sterrette, Esq.
Director, Legislative and Government Affairs

Melissa Broome
Director, Policy and Legislative Affairs

dsterrette@bcps.k12.md.us
443-250-0190

mcbroome@bcps.k12.md.us
443-525-3038