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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Sponsor Testimony on HB 487 – The School Pedestrian Safety Act

Chair Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan, Colleagues,

Thank you for the opportunity to present today on my legislation HB 487, the School Pedestrian Safety Act, which passed the Appropriations Committee and the House of Delegates with large bipartisan votes.

Crossing the road can be a dangerous undertaking in Maryland. Almost everyone is a pedestrian at one time or another so pedestrian safety affects all of us. Multiple challenges face us as we work to keep pedestrians safe – communities and neighborhoods built without crosswalks, young students walking to school, distracted cell phone users not paying attention, and a road network designed for speed and cars not walkers and bikers. It is time for schools, parents, and communities to work together to ensure safe routes for all pedestrians, particularly families and students walking to and from school.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration:

- There was a more than 3% increase in the number of pedestrians killed in traffic crashes in 2018, totaling 6,283 deaths -- the most deaths since 1990.ⁱ
- In 2017, a pedestrian was killed every 88 minutes.ⁱⁱ

In Maryland, the number of pedestrian fatalities continues to mount. According to the 2018 Maryland Pedestrian Safety Program Area Brief issued by the Motor Vehicles Administration:

- Overall, the number of pedestrian crashes and those resulting in injuries and/or fatalities have increased in Maryland over the past five years.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Fatalities are highest among pedestrian-involved crashes. Annually, Maryland drivers are involved in over 3,000 pedestrian crashes, and nearly 92% of those result in injury or fatality.^{iv}
- Nearly one out of every five people killed in Maryland in a traffic accident was a pedestrian.^v
- The fall season, when school is getting into full swing, accounts for the highest number of total pedestrian crashes.^{vi}
- Since the beginning of the pandemic, there have been fewer cars on the road, but the rate of speed has increased dramatically. According to the Maryland State Police, 69% of speeding citations issued from March 16 to April 17 cited drivers exceeding posted speed limits by 20 mph or higher. More than 375 citations noted speeds of 90 mph or more.^{vii} This reckless driving will pose a real danger to our students once they return to school.

Pedestrians should feel safe at all times for making environmentally friendly choices of choosing

to walk places instead of relying on transportation. But in reality, on average, more than 3,000 pedestrians are injured annually in Maryland and nearly 100 are killed.^{viii} Of those 3,000 pedestrian injuries, 578 of them were children below the age of 19, and nearly half were hurt walking to or from school.

This bill is simple and straightforward. It requires school districts to develop pedestrian safety plans as part of the school construction process when building new schools or building significant new additions to existing schools.

Specifically, the bill requires that:

- 1) School districts seeking state funds for the construction of a new school or additions to an existing school, which would increase the capacity by more than 100 students, to submit a pedestrian safety plan to the IAC;
- 2) The safety plan must identify existing and potential safe routes for students to walk or bike to school;
- 3) The safety plan must evaluate existing infrastructure, including sidewalks, along current and potential routes to determine if increased capacity is needed;
- 4) An analysis of existing and potential school zones, including the need for expanding school zones on state and county roads; and
- 5) Schools districts must submit documentation of public participation related to the safety plan including minutes from a public meeting.

This all must be done in collaboration with local Departments of Transportation and the State Highway Administration as needed. By bringing together schools, community stakeholders, students and parents, this bill provides a critical step forward in developing comprehensive plans to protect our children as they travel to and from school.

After reaching a compromise to accommodate rural counties, the bill passed with large bipartisan support this year and last year. Unfortunately, because of COVID, the bill did not have time to be considered in the Senate in 2020. I hope you will give HB 487 full consideration and would ask for a favorable report.

ⁱ "Pedestrian Safety." NHTSA, October 24, 2019. <https://www.nhtsa.gov/road-safety/pedestrian-safety>.

ⁱⁱ Ibid

ⁱⁱⁱ Maryland Vehicle Administration "Pedestrian Safety in Maryland." Glen Burnie, PDF. 2018.

^{iv} Ibid

^v Ibid

^{vi} Ibid

^{vii} <https://www.thebaynet.com/articles/0520/maryland-pedestrian-fatalities-decrease-in-2019-overall-roadway-fatalities-increase.html#:~:text=Glen%20Burnie%2C%20Md.,compared%20to%20133%20in%202018>.

^{viii} Montgomery County Department of Transportation. "Welcome to the Blair Walk Project." Spring, 2012