

Testimony
By Daniel Langenkamp
On the Sarah Langenkamp Memorial Safety Act SB0315
Maryland Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
Thursday, February 22, 2024

Senate: Good afternoon, Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Committee Members.

Eighteen months ago, my wife, Sarah Debbink Langenkamp, a U.S. diplomat and the mother of our two boys, was crushed when a driver for Beacon Building Supply swung his 50,000 pound truck into his parking lot without seeing Sarah, who was riding her bike in a clearly marked bike lane to his right. He struck her handlebars first, and when she fell, the wheels of his massive truck rolled over her, crushing her, and killing her.

We both had just been evacuated from Ukraine, a war zone, *for our safety*, only to see Sarah killed on a street in Bethesda weeks after our arrival.

You would think the crime of killing a person would engender a punishment worthy of the magnitude of the act. After all, Maryland imposes stiff punishments for less serious crimes. The maximum penalty for [littering](#) can land you a fine of \$30,000 and five years in prison.

Yet when the driver who killed Sarah was sentenced in September, he was handed a sentence for a traffic violation that carried a fine of just \$2,000 and 150 hours of community service -- the maximum punishment allowed by law for killing a vulnerable road user. His license was referred for a six-month suspension to the Maryland Department of Motor Vehicles. He will likely be driving again next month.

The judge in the case, expressing his own frustration, said the law simply did not give him the ability to impose a stiffer sentence because the crime of killing with a vehicle was considered a traffic violation. I'm sorry, he said. The law did not give him the ability to do anything more.

In the wake of the sentencing, I have worked with Montgomery County State Attorney John McCarthy, Delegate Sara Love, and Senator Ariana Kelly to craft a bill that would help rectify this situation. It is an elegant fix for a gap in the law. Why not, McCarthy suggested, give some of the same protections to people in bike lanes and shoulders that exist for pedestrians in crosswalks across the state of Maryland?

The Sarah Debbink Langenkamp Memorial Safety Act ([HB0337](#) in the Maryland House and [SB0315](#) in the Senate) does just that, and a bit more. The penalties are modest -- up to 60 days in jail and a fine of up to \$2,000 for a person who causes a crash with a cyclist in a bike lane or shoulder. (The fine for crosswalks is slightly more modest, just \$1,000).

It is a far cry from the penalty we currently have for littering, but is it far better than the current law. And it sends an important signal to all drivers that bike lanes and shoulders are special-- *protected and safe* for cyclists.

There is a clear precedent for providing these protections. We create substantial penalties for drivers who speed in school zones, pass stopped school buses, or provide the same jail time for those who hit pedestrians in crosswalks. As a society we agree that it is not only cars who have a right to use our roads.

Sarah's death was a tragedy that has robbed our country of an extraordinary diplomat--a star of our generation of foreign service officers, and irreparably changed every minute of my family's present and future.

Her death was tragic, but it was not a fluke or an "accident." She was part of a thousands of "vulnerable road users" to die on U.S. roads in 2022, when more bikers were killed than since 1994 and when more pedestrians died than in 40 years, partially due to the fact that lines and sticker alone DON'T make bikers and pedestrians safer. Just like with school zones, you need law enforcement too--as well as safe speeds, safe drivers, safe vehicles, and safe road engineering.

We know that a stiff penalty alone for killing won't suddenly create zero deaths in Maryland. But with trends like these, we need to do something.

The roads of our industrialized peers' are getting safer and safer every year. Pedestrians are twice as likely to get killed on our roads than in Canada; they are four to six times more likely to be killed on our roads than in the safest counties, like Iceland and Singapore.

Sarah's bill says we care about more than just littering. We care about life, too.