

Melissa A Schweisguth  
Hyattsville, MD (D22)  
February 21, 2024

RE: FAVORABLE position on SB0315, the Sarah Debbink Langenkamp Memorial Act

Dear Chair Smith and Members of the Judicial proceedings committee,

Thank you for your service to our state. I am writing to express my support for SB0315, the Sarah Debbink Langenkamp Memorial Act and ask that the committee provide a favorable report and support its full passage. As someone who bikes as a primary mode of transportation, I am keenly aware of driver negligence, which must be addressed fully, now, to save lives.

SB0315 memorializes Sarah Debbink Langenkamp, who was tragically crushed by a truck driver while legally cycling in a bike lane on River Road, MD 190, in August 2022. The driver, Santos Reyes Martinez, pleaded guilty but received only token penalties for the highly negligent driving that took Sarah's life.

Penalties serve as a key deterrent to driver negligence and a motivator for driver vigilance, but must be substantive enough to have an effect. Current Maryland penalties for hitting a bicyclist in a bike lane are not substantive enough to change current levels of driver negligence. SB0315 would address this weakness by imposing penalties that are proportionate to the severity of the violent harm caused by a driver who hits a cyclist in a bike lane. While penalties alone are not sufficient, they are a critical tool for Vision Zero, to be complemented by improved road design, safer speeds, and safer vehicles. Our state must enact SB0315 while implementing complementary measures to deter negligence and save lives.

SB0315 is urgently needed as Maryland is seeing increased numbers of cyclists who are killed and severely injured by drivers, when those cyclists are legally using our roadways. Eleven bicyclists were killed by drivers on Maryland roads in 2022, the year Sarah Langenkamp was killed. Fifteen bicyclists were killed on Maryland roads in 2023, an increase of more than 35 percent from the year before. The state is straying farther away from its goal of zero road deaths and serious injuries by 2030 as road road deaths are getting worse for cyclists, pedestrians and drivers alike. The impact on Maryland families including Sarah Langenkamp's is devastating.

The Administration and the General Assembly must adjust penalties while providing the attention, resources, and funding needed to create safe transportation infrastructure, to draw some redemption from the deaths of 304 pedestrians and bicyclists, including Sarah Debbink Langenkamp, on Maryland's roads in just the last two years. Please provide a Favorable SB0315 committee report and House floor vote.

Thank you for considering my testimony.

Melissa A Schweisguth

