

Committee: Appropriations Committee
Testimony on: HB0487 - "School Pedestrian Safety Act"

Organization: Climate Parents of Prince George's
Person Submitting: Joseph Jakuta, Lead Volunteer
Position: Favorable, With Amendments
Hearing Date: January 27, 2021

Climate Parents of Prince George's, supports HB 487, "School Pedestrian Safety Act" with amendments.

Schools that are safe to walk or bicycle to are an important asset for our children. Studies have found that increased physical activity leads to improved academic performance.¹ There is numerous evidence linking health and well being with increased physical activity.² As students age and mature, being able to access school on their own also allows for more opportunities for extracurricular activities, an increased relationship with the learning environment, and a greater sense of independence.

There are other benefits from decreasing the number of vehicles at schools, which would happen if schools were safer to walk or bike to. There would be a decrease in the amount of vehicles idling at pick up and dropoff, which cleans the air and is very important for people suffering from asthma.³ Decreasing the number of vehicles also will lead to less accidents involving personal vehicles and students, which is a concern given the high rates of distracted driving that have been observed at schools.⁴

One aspect of what Climate Parents of Prince George's County is calling for is to end emissions from transportation in order to meet climate goals necessary in line with the science. While electric buses are clearly a major part of the solution, making sure that schools are easily and safely accessible by foot or bicycle is also a vital step in achieving this goal. And this legislation would lead us down that path.

We do have concerns with inclusion of the entirety of the "HIGH-DENSITY COUNTY" under the mandate. While we understand that it is much simpler to determine compliance, there are portions of some of the counties included, such as the Hereford Zone in Baltimore County and southern Prince George's County that are not developed enough to lead to successful walkable/bikeable schools. We would recommend relying on a metric based on housing density of the school zone to determine if compliance is necessary in these counties.

We also find that 5-324 (C)(3) should include an evaluation of bicycle parking and other needed infrastructure (e.g., repair racks). No one will bike to school if they cannot safely store their bike.

We encourage a FAVORABLE report with the recommended AMENDMENTS for this important legislation.

¹ Center for Disease Control. 2010. "The Association Between School-Based Physical Activity, Including Physical Education, and Academic Performance." https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/health_and_academics/pdf/pa-pe_paper.pdf

² American Heart Association. "What's the Link Between Physical Activity and Health?" <https://www.heart.org/en/health-topics/cardiac-rehab/getting-physically-active/whats-the-link-between-physical-activity-and-health>

³ Department of Energy. "Reducing Vehicle Idling Time at School Helps Kids—and Parents—Breathe Easier." <https://www.energy.gov/energysaver/articles/reducing-vehicle-idling-time-school-helps-kids-and-parents-breathe-easier>

⁴ Safe Kids Worldwide. October 2016. "Alarming Dangers in School Zones." https://www.safekids.org/sites/default/files/alarming_dangers_in_school_zones.pdf