

Committee: Judicial Proceedings

Testimony on: SB 0011 - “Motor Vehicles - Speed Limits – School Zones”

Organization: Climate Parents of Prince George’s

Person Submitting: Joseph Jakuta, Lead Volunteer

Position: Unfavorable

Hearing Date: January 25, 2023



Dear Mr. Chairman and Committee Members:

Thank you for considering our testimony in opposition to SB 0011, which concerns reducing the radius of school zones to 1/10th of a mile. Climate Parents is a campaign to reduce climate change causing pollution in our schools, and our group is active in Prince George’s County. In particular, we recently worked directly with Prince George’s County Public Schools (PGCPS) technical staff and other advocates to develop a first in the national School Climate Change Action Plan.

In our work developing a Climate Change Action Plan for PGCPS, one of the main solutions to reducing vehicle emissions was to encourage more walking and biking to school. This is particularly important for students that live within the non-transportation areas, which are defined as being within 1½ mile for elementary school students and 2 miles for middle and high school students in Prince George’s County.¹ However, one of the barriers to walking and biking to school is feeling unsafe, which is largely due to dangerous driving. When students and their parents do not feel it is safe to get to school by other means, they drive independently, which results in more localized air pollution at the entrance of schools, more wasted time for parents, and more chances for vehicles-on-pedestrian collisions at schools.

SB0011 moves exactly in the wrong direction. Rather than trying to increase road safety by expanding school zones to match non-transportation areas, this bill tries to make the least vulnerable road users, namely drivers, less accountable for following Maryland laws and keeping our children safe on their way to and from school. This bill would take away numerous tools, most importantly speeding cameras and increased fines, while working to benefit scofflaws that do not follow Maryland’s traffic laws.

We already have problems with pedestrian safety in Maryland. Pedestrian deaths in Maryland have remained stubbornly high since 2017.² Given that drivers can already violate the law by speeding 12 miles per hour over the legal limit before being issued a camera ticket, this means these vehicles are in the range of being much more likely to cause a fatality (AAA finds that the chances of a pedestrian dying in an accident are 75% for a vehicle traveling 39 mph).³ To consider legislation that would hamper the ability to enforce traffic limits and thus increase the possibility of pedestrian deaths, specifically among students, is not a positive direction.

We encourage an **UNFAVORABLE** report for this important legislation.

1

<https://www.pgcps.org/globalassets/offices/general-counsel/docs---general-counsel/administrative-procedures/3000/administrative-procedure-3541---student-transportation.pdf>

² https://zerodeathsmd.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/FFY23_Ped_ProgramAreaBrief-Data_Final.pdf

³ <https://aaafoundation.org/impact-speed-pedestrians-risk-severe-injury-death/>