

Testimony on: CR-009-2024

Organization: Climate Parents of Prince George's

Person Submitting: Joseph Jakuta, Lead Volunteer

Position: Support

Hearing Date: April 9, 2024



Dear County Council:

Thank you for considering our testimony in support of CR-009-2024, a “Resolution Concerning School Pedestrian Safety Workgroup.” 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 worked directly with Prince George’s County Public Schools (PGCPS) technical staff and other advocates to develop a Climate Action Plan for PGCPS as part of a Board of Education Focus Workgroup.

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.

In Prince George’s County, we know firsthand the tragedy that comes when students walking to school are not kept safe. In November 2023, two of our students were killed in a crosswalk by a driver as they walked to school. While this particular legislation will likely not have prevented that specific tragedy, there are numerous close calls every day on the roads that would be affected by this legislation.

We do have concerns that those that manage our state roads, namely State Highway Administration, are not included. While we understand why the County Council cannot direct state employees to participate, we also realize that many of the most dangerous roads for students to cross are state highways. Over half of the schools in Prince George’s County have a state highway within 500 feet of the school grounds and numerous schools are built so that their entrances are directly on state highways. There will be no hope of having safe routes to school if County officials need to plead with the SHA to make the roads they manage safe for students.

We also would encourage the workgroup to focus solely on safe access directly preceding morning bell and directly following afternoon bell. Students, especially high school students in extracurricular activities need to safely travel at different hours. Additionally, young people should not lose the right to safely use our streets if they happen to be traveling somewhere that is not school (e.g., to an after school job, to a weekend sporting event, to a friend’s house, etc.). The solutions need to look holistically at safe access.

¹
<https://www.pgcps.org/globalassets/offices/general-counsel/docs---general-counsel/administrative-procedures/3000/administrative-procedure-3541---student-transportation.pdf>

Our children are counting on the County Council to address safe access to schools. We do believe that this workgroup will lead the Prince George's County government to prioritize safer access to schools in its road design and other transportation concerns, but remain concerned that this cannot truly address the problem without State Highway Administration being at the table.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Joseph Jakuta".

Joseph Jakuta
Lead Volunteer
Climate Parents of Prince George's