

Testimony on: School Pedestrian Safety Workgroup Recommendations
Organization: Climate Parents of Prince George's
Person Submitting: Joseph Jakuta, Lead Volunteer
Date: December 8, 2024



Dear Prince George's County School Pedestrian Safety Workgroup:

Thank you for considering our testimony on the final recommendations from the Prince George's County 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 some specific comments on the recommendations that we would like to provide.

- Concerning recommendation 1, we are favorable to this recommendation generally, though want to note that this type of assessment is a requirement under state law. The Safe Walk to School Act (HB 19, 2022 Session) requires such plans to be developed in Prince George's and submitted to The Interagency Commission on School Construction (IAC) for review. We would recommend that the final recommendations specifically include IAC as a party in addition to the State Highway Administration (SHA) and to make specific reference to the legal requirements in place.
- Concerning recommendation 2, we are quite favorable to this recommendation. While it is important to get pedestrian plans around new schools correct, the vast majority of students will attend already existing schools and need to be kept safe. We also would note that the reference to the Safe Walk to School Act should also be made here since the act also applies to renovations that increase school size by 100 students.

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

- Concerning recommendations 3, 4, and 6, it is vital to have a consistent approach across Prince George's County towards pedestrian safety. It is especially important that DPW&T be at the table and an implementing participant. Furthermore, we would recommend that the pedestrian safety scores developed in recommendation 6 become a requirement before roads are built, expanded, or altered, and projects in school zones are forbidden from proceeding if pedestrian safety scores are below a threshold.
- Concerning recommendation 9, this may just be the most impactful recommendation that can be implemented quickly. All evidence points toward speeds above 20 miles per hour being dangerous to all pedestrians, especially children, and that the risks rise greatly with each increment of additional speed. Furthermore, this recommendation should also include the installation of automated traffic enforcement, with revenues going to pedestrian safety infrastructure or personnel.
- We wanted to express our specific support for recommendation 12. Too many parents rushing for drop-off increases the danger to walking students, and this will encourage some parents to shift their children to other modes of transportation to arrive at school.
- Regarding recommendation 15, we do think this is a potential approach, but we are concerned about inequities given that most students do not reside in municipalities, and an additional approach needs to be considered. Some thoughts are having professionals available more during the day to also help with rush hour and lunch traffic direction to create a more full-time position or seeking out community volunteers.
- One recommendation not included that should be considered is shrinking the distance for which students are not guaranteed bus service. Transportation planners have the general rule of thumb that ½ mile is walkable, so expecting elementary students to walk if they are 1½ miles away is quite extensive and increases the chances of dangerous road encounters. The same goes for other students having to walk from 2 miles away. If they are not walking those distances, the chances are their parents are driving them, and this could also switch more students away from car drop-off, which is also a dangerous event, as discussed in our comments on recommendation 12.
- We are also generally favorable to the other recommendations but have no additional comments on them.

Our children are counting on the County Council to address safe access to schools. We do believe that the recommendations of this workgroup will lead the Prince George's County government to prioritize safer access to schools by pedestrians and other vulnerable road users.

Sincerely,



Joseph Jakuta
Lead Volunteer
Climate Parents of Prince George's