

Committee: Environment and Transportation

Testimony on: HB 811 - "Safe Alternative Routes to Public Schools"

Organization: Climate Parents of Prince George's

Person Submitting: Joseph Jakuta, Lead Volunteer

Position: Favorable

Hearing Date: March 4, 2025



Dear Mr. Chairman and Committee Members:

Thank you for considering our testimony to HB 811, "Safe Alternative Routes to Public Schools." 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 first-in-the-nation 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.

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 are supportive of this approach of requiring annual examinations of safe routes to schools and to require counties to implement missing sidewalks necessary to create safe routes to schools. This will be a positive step towards making walking to school safer for students. Given modern Geographic Information System (GIS) software these types of maps should be quite reasonable to produce efficiently at a low cost.

We do think it would be wise for the State Board of Education to have a role in ensuring that the plans are completed as expected and meet the legal requirements.

We do applaud that this legislation has been brought forward. We cannot live sustainably if our students cannot access their places of learning by safely walking or biking there. Each student that does not have access to LEA-provided transportation should be able to get to school safely. We need a stronger version of this bill to put Maryland on the path toward that reality.

We encourage a **FAVORABLE** report for this important legislation.

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