Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment
Testimony on: SB526 - "Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day"
Organization: Climate Parents of Prince George's
Person Submitting: Joseph Jakuta, Lead Volunteer
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: March 4, 2026

Dear Mr. Chairman and Committee Members:

Thank you for considering our testimony to SB526, "Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day." 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 and more chances for vehicles-on-pedestrian collisions at schools.

Ruby Bridges Day is an excellent avenue to break down the barriers when it comes to safe walking to school. Like "Bike to Work Day" it is an opportunity for students and parents that may not otherwise walk to school to see what the possibilities are so as to start to make decisions that could be better for their health, personal economics, and the planet.

Ruby Bridges is also a great way to connect civil justice with climate justice. The most sustainable way to access school is to walk. During Ruby Bridge's time in school walking was how nearly every child accessed their school house, granting them freedom to move and better opportunity for physical activity. But now students are often driven by their parents because we have made our streets unsafe for them, which in turn treats them second class citizens while harming the air they breathe and the planet they will inherit.

Ruby Bridges was brave as she walked to school. By honoring her legacy with Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day we instill the sense of bravery into the students of today that they will need to to face the challenging problems we will leave them and encourage pursuing an empowering, sustainable way to access their education.

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

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