

Good evening. My name is Annalisse Daly. In your recent joint meeting with the Board of Education, you discussed what is known as "hazard busing." Typically, students living less than a given radius from their school are designated walkers. However, when the route is too dangerous to traverse on foot, Howard County pays to bus those students in—at a tune of \$68,000 per bus per year. Sometimes the hazards are entirely preventable, however. At Guilford Elementary, students as close as 0.1 mile from the school are bused in for want of a simple sidewalk. As you learned in your joint meeting, some of these sidewalks have been planned and funded but have remained unbuilt for almost a decade. This is the case with capital budget #J2407, for example, where following through on this project, as well as funding an additional 0.3 a mile of new sidewalk would safely connect a total of 504 homes to Guilford Elementary. Together these would eliminate the need for 1-2 school buses after consolidating routes and save the school system tens of thousands—or hundreds of thousands—of dollars per year. Since money for the school system comes directly from the county, this would save money for all of us.

And we needn't pay full price for this project! Grant money from the federal Safe Routes to School program will pay up to 80% of the costs for implementing walking and biking infrastructure around K-8 schools. That does not include high schools, but it means we can significantly defray the upfront costs by prioritizing sidewalk networks affected by the grant. We should absolutely target projects that would eliminate hazard busing, but we can and should take advantage of the grant to improve other areas of our infrastructure. For example, a friend of mine bikes to school with her children to St. John's Elementary, but wouldn't dare let them go alone over the dangerously ambiguous Ridgewood Rd. and Chatham Road intersection. The homes in her neighborhood are designated walking areas, but many parents drive their children instead of walking or biking because places like this intersection feel too risky even for adults.

And they have some cause for concern. Just this last December, we had two separate pedestrian fatalities here in Howard County: one teenager, and one 43-year-old man. Last year was also the deadliest on record along Route 1, where five pedestrians died trying to walk along or cross the road. Granted, these fatalities happened along unusually busy roads and many of the deadliest roads are state funded, not county roads. But the same route that has been deemed too hazardous for my children to walk to school is the exact same route that my neighbor Renee walks every day to access the public transit bus stop. The same crosswalk that would safely shepherd children across Oakland Mills Road on their way to Guilford Elementary could just as easily shepherd the runners and dog walkers who risk that intersection every morning. The same protected bike lanes that allow students to bike safely to school would also protect the adult bikers and even people in motorized wheelchairs. This infrastructure helps everyone, not just kids.

As you consider the budget this year, I respectfully request that you prioritize sidewalks and biking infrastructure. Using grants, we can stretch the dollars that are already there. Increased funding on strategic projects can minimize hazard busing to use our dollars more efficiently. And in the end, we can provide a safe, equitable means of moving around for all members of our community, whether they drive a car or not.