

CALVIN BALL
County Executive



LISA D. MYERS
Chief of Police

HOWARD COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF POLICE
3410 Court House Drive, Ellicott City, Maryland 21043

DATE: May 14, 2019

TO: Lonnie R. Robbins
Chief Administrative Officer

FROM: Lisa D. Myers *ADM*
Chief of Police

SUBJECT: Testimony for Council Bill No. 18-2019 which would allow for the placement of school bus monitoring cameras on busses and the issuance of citations

As the Chief of the Howard County Police Department, I recognize there is no greater responsibility than to maximize the safety of the children within our community. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, between 2006 and 2015, there were 1,313 people killed in school transportation-related accidents. Approximately 102 of those victims were classified as school-age pedestrians.

Naturally, I am eager to partner with Howard County Public Schools to promote school bus safety. Council Bill No. 18-2019 allows for the placement of school bus monitoring cameras on buses and the issuance of citations. The use of school bus monitoring cameras as an enforcement tool is authorized by the Maryland Transportation Article of the Annotated Code of Maryland, Section 21-706.1. The placement of cameras on busses to capture motorist violations is a proven approach to raising awareness, deterring violations, and issuing fines when children are placed at risk.

The use of similar automated enforcement technology has been successful in Howard County for capturing red light violations and speed violations in school zones.

Partnering with our school system, this program would place cameras on HCPS-contracted school busses to capture images of vehicles which violate Section 21-706 of the Transportation Article of the Annotated Code of Maryland that requires drivers to stop within a certain distance from a school vehicle when the school vehicle is operating its alternately flashing red lights. The technology has been successfully used elsewhere in Maryland.



Our neighbors in Montgomery County have been successfully using similar technology since 2016. Washington and St. Mary's Counties also have on-going programs that are much more limited (only 7 equipped buses in Washington County and 5 equipped in St. Mary's.) It is important to recognize that Frederick County tried a similar program at the beginning of the 2012/2013 school year but discontinued the program in early 2017 when the volume was too low to sustain the ongoing effort.

A program here in Howard County would begin when an authorized vendor installs the necessary equipment in contracted school buses as managed by our School System. The equipment would automatically begin video recording when a school bus stop-arm is extended. Encrypted video would likely be transmitted to our Regional Automated Enforcement Center, where human processors would manually review the events to see if a vehicle approached and overtook the school bus while the stop equipment was activated. If a violation is identified, still shots are obtained, including a license plate image. The vehicle's registered owner is then identified using the National Law Enforcement Telecommunications Service (NLETS) and the Police Department's Originating Agency Identifier (ORI). The images, video, owner information and vehicle information would then be reviewed by Howard County Police personnel to accept or reject as a civil violation. Approved violations would then be printed and mailed. A full-time Police Administrator would manage the process, including quality control review requirements similar to our red light and speed enforcement processes.

Registered owners receiving a citation would be afforded the standard appeal process and the HCPD's Administrator would appear in court for those cases. Research reveals that less than 0.5% of issued citations result in a hearing request (this is on par with our experience for red light camera violations)ⁱ. Other research indicates that hearing requests are at approximately 0.1% in Marylandⁱⁱ. Montgomery County reports dockets of 75 cases per month from their approximately 500-600+ equipped buses as of October 2018.

The amount of the actual fine will be set by the Courts, but we anticipate each violation will be \$250. If a police officer witnessed the same violation, the driver would face a citation for \$570 dollars and 3 points.

The intent of the program is to modify driver behaviors to use more caution around school buses. A robust public awareness campaign would accompany this project to help raise awareness.

It is difficult to project how many violations might be captured in Howard County. However, based on the data known to us from Montgomery County along with a two-month Howard County studyⁱⁱⁱ, violations could range from 7,000-50,000 or more per year, if all 468 Howard County buses were equipped with cameras.

The police department is prepared to work swiftly to develop a Memorandum of Understanding with the School System to launch this project. We know that the initial launch may be just 50 of the 468 Howard County busses and expand over time, similar to program

implementation in other jurisdictions. The police department has requested the needed new position of Program Administrator in our FY2020 operating budget. The cost of the program Administrator is approximately \$86,812 annually. The position is the only cost associated with this program. We are aware that the contracted vendor may keep up to 100% of citation revenue until such time as they have recovered the cost of equipment and program implementation, after that time, some type of revenue sharing will likely be developed by the County and School Board.

Any actual revenue generated from school bus monitoring cameras is restricted similar to speed camera program revenue.^{iv}

Even though we can not project the full volume of violations at this time, the need to enhance student safety warrants the implementation of this program. Even if no revenues reach the County, reducing the likelihood of a student being struck is invaluable. The goal of this program would be to modify negative driving behaviors that put our children at risk, not generate fine revenue.

I welcome the opportunity to provide further information or answer questions that would support this initiative.

ⁱ This data was provided by Bus Patrol, an established industry vendor.

ⁱⁱ Source of data is Verra Mobility, an established industry vendor.

ⁱⁱⁱ In 2014, Howard County operated a pilot program from April 30, 2014, to June 20, 2014, on two school buses. Thirty-three (33) potential violations were recorded over thirty-six (36) school days (averaging 0.46 potential violations per bus, per school day). We have also researched the violation rate in Montgomery County, which ranges from 0.18 citations per bus, per day to 0.358 citations per bus, per day based on the location of the bus route and other factors.

^{iv} According to Senate Bill 679 (Ch. 273, Acts 2011) and Courts and Judicial Proceedings Article § 7-302 (e)(4)(i)(1-2) it may be used to, "...recover the costs of implementing and administering [the program]...", and "...may spend any remaining balance solely for public safety purposes, including pedestrian safety programs."