

## Carranza, Amankaya

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**From:** Corinne Happel <corinne.happel@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Monday, April 17, 2023 10:46 PM  
**To:** CouncilMail  
**Subject:** Save our School Buses for safety, for equity, for Earth

[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

Dear Howard County Council,

I attended last Wednesday's County Council / Board of Education Joint Meeting and would like to follow up with some additional points as they relate to student safety with school bus cancellations and other modifications to transportation policy 5200. I am highly concerned about the safety of my children and other children in Howard County.

Three key points that I do not think were addressed at Wednesday's meeting:

- 1) Safety is a huge concern in revisions to Policy 5200. While the Board of Education is referring concerned citizens to the Transportation office to address these concerns, **many safety concerns do not relate to the physical structure of walking routes and are outside of the jurisdiction of the transportation office.**
  - a. For middle schoolers and high schoolers who are generally walking these longer routes alone up to 1.5 miles and up to 2.0 miles respectively unsupervised, parents and caregivers have expressed concerns about the risk for stalking by child predators. Routes that pass by homes of registered sex offenders are not excluded from safe walking paths. Children who have a history of molestation or violence against them feel vulnerable by new requirements to walk from far distances to school if they have no access to private vehicles.
  - b. Car rider pick up and drop off lines are already overwhelmed at Howard County schools and many administrators have reached out to parents and students multiple times this year recommending that they take an assigned bus to avoid the congestion and car idling in school parking lots that pollutes school air and presents safety challenges. Recently, at least one child was struck in a pick-up line at a local HCPSS school and was rushed to the ER. Local neighbors feel scared that this could happen to them both as pedestrians (being run over) and as drivers who struggle to see pedestrians in busy pick up zones. The children who are losing school bus service are the ones who are further distances away than the children in current walk zones who are choosing to be driven to school. **As this non-service area expands outward, the majority of children who are losing service will be the ones who are driven in private vehicles if they can afford it.** As a result, current car lines in congested school parking lots will continue to expand as the visibility of walking school children and their safety decreases.
  - c. **School bus cancellations will lead to under-supervision of young elementary school children.** Families who do not have access to a private vehicle for school commutes will either need to pay someone to walk their child further distances, lose valuable income earning hours (think about walking round trip to and from a school that

is 1, 1.5, or 2.0 miles away back and forth twice daily – easily over 5 miles), or more likely leave children under-supervised. Particularly for elementary school students including pre-K and kindergarten students, under-supervision on school commutes can have devastating consequences when a child does not see a car coming and runs across a street.

2) In addition to having children walking or being driven in private vehicles from further distances to schools in Howard County, children may have to walk or drive significantly increased distances to their school bus stops. **While previously the maximum allowable distance from home to a bus stop was 0.5 miles, bus stops for elementary school students can now be up to 1.0 mile away, bus stops for middle school students can be 1.5 miles away, and bus stops for high schoolers can be 2.0 miles away.** This was not discussed at the meeting and has not been advertised to parents. In discussions with many parents, most are not aware. Bus stops and routes are not released until August. Just as parents & caregivers were shocked to see announcements that their school bus was canceled in the days right before spring break, others will be shocked to see that they too will be highly affected by transportation 5200 policy changes when they see in August that their school bus stop is a mile or more away from their home. Concerns about increased cars on Howard County roads, equity, and safety as they relate to bus cancellations are compounded by the change in bus stop distances from homes.

3) As per statistics cited by HCPSS transportation head Nevin, more than a third of children losing their school bus next year are **ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILDREN** (1,350 out of 3,500 of children are the figures cited during the meeting). That is more than 1 out of every 20 elementary school students in Howard County who will lose school bus service next year. As we think about equity and the young children who have fallen behind during the pandemic (the children with less were more likely to miss crucial educational milestones), it is concerning that we will expect their caregivers to walk close to five miles roundtrip daily to supervise them going back and forth to the school in the morning and afternoon. These parents and caregivers need time to spend working on skills like reading with their children, reviewing basic math facts, or earning valuable income to pay for surging grocery bills, rent/property tax, and childcare in Howard County. **These children should not be tired, exhausted, cold, or wet when they arrive at school because they did not have access to a private vehicle when it was stormy, wet, or cold.** We do not allow children to go outside for recess when it rains or when wind chill temperatures drop below 20 degrees F. Why would we require children with less to be exposed to bad weather over distances that take longer to walk than the average time for recess? Transportation Policy 5200 revisions will not just cause high school students with less to fall behind, it will continue to widen the gap between elementary children in Howard County with less and elementary children in Howard County with more.

Parents are looking for a hero. A leader or group of leaders to rise to the occasion and reinstate bus service to the thousands of children losing service in Howard County under revisions to Transportation Policy 5200. **Cuts to school bus access come at a time when parents and caregivers are being hard hit by surging inflation hitting big ticket expenses like rent and property tax, childcare, and grocery bills.** Parents have fallen behind in their careers and financially as they took time off to care for children when crucial services were canceled during the pandemic. Affected families were not specifically informed or consulted for an opinion prior to policy 5200 changes, and now that concerns have come up, we need to find solutions. Many parents losing school bus

coverage are so desperate that they have asked for ways to pay to reinstate bus service; fees could be used to subsidize school bus costs for recipients of Free and Reduced Meals or those meeting other need-based criteria. Partnerships with RTA have been discussed as an option. Governor Wes Moore has recently created a year of service for graduates, and should revisions be made to current bus driver hiring requirements, graduates could be offered work as school bus drivers as a way to give back and learn more about their community and as a way to serve as role models for younger students. If we invited more people to sit at the decision-making table, perhaps there are other unheard solutions that will emerge. What can you do to help?

As Council member Deb Jung prompted at the recent joint Howard County Council/Board of Education meeting, let's "think outside the box." Parents are open to suggestions. Let's not hurt our children.

Please save our school buses!

Respectfully,

Corinne Happel

## Carranza, Amankaya

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**From:** Victor Ilenda <victor.ilenda@verizon.net>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, April 26, 2023 3:42 PM  
**To:** boe@hcpss.org; CouncilMail  
**Subject:** Comments Regarding Expanded Walker Area

[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

To: HCPSS Board of Education and HC Council

Our community, Chateau Ridge Lake Community Association (CRLCA), recently held a virtual meeting due to concerns raised by the announcement by HCPSS of the plan for an "expanded walker area" for the 2023-2024 school year. Students and their families were notified shortly before the Easter break that every household in our community would lose school bus service to Centennial Elementary School, Burleigh Manor Middle School, as well as Centennial High School. Of the three schools affected, the most serious problem is loss of service for the elementary school children. There are no sidewalks within CRLCA and only limited options for use of sidewalks within the Burleigh Manor area or along the west side of Centennial Lane. Parents are very concerned with the prospect of having elementary school age kids walk along Centennial Lane for obvious safety concerns.

The root cause of this problem appears to be the lack of contractually available buses (and drivers) which HCPSS has used in the past. So it is not a funding problem but a resource problem. But solving the problem in the manner implied via the "expanded walker area" seems like a move to shift responsibility for transportation from HCPSS to the parents of children. People move to Howard County (one of the wealthiest in the US) because of the environment, quality of life, and the excellent school system. Lack of school bus transportation certainly would impact the desire of families with school age children to move into Howard County. And lack of school bus transportation would impact home values for those planning on selling their homes.

Rather than push the problem onto families, the HCPSS and the Howard County Council should strive to solve the shortfall of buses in more proactive ways. Some of the ways through which the bus shortfall might be mitigated include: a) having Howard County acquire a small number of school buses to augment those made available contractually; b) develop a working relationship with the existing public transportation system(s) to handle the additional needs; c) modify school start and stop times to allow more trips per bus. I suspect other alternatives are also being evaluated and this mailing is probably one of many which you have/are receiving from numerous other communities.

All things considered, getting our children to and from school in a safe manner is the most important issue for parents. If you insist that children should walk to school, as most/all of us did when we were in elementary school, you must provide the means for them. Namely, at the very least, residential areas near schools should have sidewalks. Unfortunately our neighborhood (CRLCA) does not have them, so our situation is in the hands of the HCPSS-BOE and HC Council. Hopefully the request for a Safety Reassessment to the HCPSS by CRLCA does not fall on deaf ears and bus service will be provided for the 2023-2024 school year.

Respectfully,

VA Ilenda, President  
CRLCA

## Carranza, Amankaya

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**From:** Vilma Pereira <aracely131519@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Friday, April 28, 2023 6:11 PM  
**To:** Adam Downes; Jacquelin\_McCoy@hcpss.org; Michael\_Martirano@hcpss.org;  
Paul\_Bertulis@hcpss.org; Robyn\_Scates@hcpss.org; Scott\_Washington@hcpss.org;  
antonia\_watts@hcpss.org; Brian Nevin; CouncilMail; jennifer\_mallo@hcpss.org;  
jolene\_mosley@hcpss.org; linfeng\_chen@hcpss.org; student\_member@hcpss.org; yun\_lu@hcpss.org  
**Subject:** School bus cancellations

[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

We need YOUR help to restore school bus service to thousands of children. The budget will be finalized May 25th so the families of Howard County appreciate anything you can do to immediately influence this negative change for our county!

This change will be detrimental to the community in the following ways: ·

**SAFETY** – Personal safety from crime, extreme weather, and having to carry a heavy backpack load such a long way.

**ACADEMICS** – Based on the updated Policy 5200, elementary school kids may need to walk up to 1.5 miles, middle schoolers up to 2 miles, and high schoolers over 2 miles EACH way with 15-20 pounds of gear. Even if they get a bus, they may have to walk that far JUST to the bus stop! How are these kids going to be able to focus on school? How will they get to school during rainy, cold, and hot weather days?

**EQUITY** – Lower income communities will be the strongest hit by the bus cuts. Bus cuts have been made disproportionately to Title 1 elementary schools and Title 1 feeds to middle and high school.

**TRAFFIC** – There are already many schools overburdened by car drop offs. Extra cars and traffic will increase air pollution throughout the county.

**ECONOMY** - Based on the Baltimore Sun article, HCPSS cut ties with all local bus vendors and awarded \$99 million in business to out-of-state bus contractors.

Full article: <https://www.baltimoresun.com/maryland/howard/cng-ho-howard-bus-contractors-20230426-wco2gg4jjzcubciindex6y5kju-story.html>

Thank you for your time!

## Carranza, Amankaya

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**From:** Tawana Bandy Fattah <tbfattah19@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Friday, April 28, 2023 3:23 PM  
**To:** CouncilMail  
**Subject:** School buses are a "must-have"

[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

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Thank you for your time!

## Carranza, Amankaya

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**From:** Marysue Vidro <mvidro@verizon.net>  
**Sent:** Saturday, April 29, 2023 7:00 AM  
**To:** antonia\_watts@hcpss.org; yun\_lu@hcpss.org; linfeng\_chen@hcpss.org; jennifer\_mallo@hcpss.org; jolene\_mosley@hcpss.org; Jacquelin\_McCoy@hcpss.org; Robyn\_Scates@hcpss.org; student\_member@hcpss.org; Scott\_Washington@hcpss.org; Michael\_Martirano@hcpss.org; Adam Downes; Paul\_Bertulis@hcpss.org; Brian Nevin; CouncilMail  
**Subject:** Protest regarding Howard County School Bus Cancellations

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