



Senate Bill 65

Counties – Construction of Sidewalks and Crosswalks – Safe Alternative Routes to Public Schools

MACo Position: **OPPOSE**

To: Education, Health, and Environmental
Affairs Committee

Date: January 22, 2020

From: Drew Jabin

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **OPPOSES** SB 65. While well-intentioned, this bill would place a costly mandate on county governments to carry out new state policy to create sidewalks and crosswalks as alternative routes for public school students. **MACo does not raise policy objections with this goal – county concerns are merely practical and cost-driven.**

As a rule, MACo resists state policies that result in costly or burdensome local implementation. SB 65 would implement a costly, difficult mandate for county governments to construct any sidewalks and crosswalks necessary for students living in certain areas to travel to school. If the route to school is not subject to the jurisdiction of the county, this bill unfairly requires counties to develop a plan with the controller of the road and re-direct county resources in order to execute the plan.

Under state law, counties have no choice but to fund these costs – competing for limited local funds against education, school construction, public safety, roadway maintenance, and other essential public services.

SB 65 also requires each county board of education to prepare a report that identifies areas of the county where a student would be ineligible for transportation as well as the pathways that a student may use to travel between the student's residence and regularly assigned school. MACo and county governments stand ready to work with state policymakers to develop educational resources that promote student access to education. While several school systems already voluntarily comply with the reporting requirement outlined in this bill, MACo supports the idea that all counties should receive this report.

This bill, as written, is a potentially significant unfunded mandate for county governments. Counties agree that this information is important in understanding the needs of Maryland students, but this legislation goes too far in mandating county funding of an unknown amount. MACo does not oppose creating safe opportunities for student access to schools, but does oppose the broadly mandated provisions currently within SB 65. For this reason, MACo **OPPOSES** SB 65 and urges an **UNFAVORABLE** report.