

Dear Members of the Montgomery County Council,

My name is Michael Larkin and I am a resident of Silver Spring. I support the enactment and strengthening of the Safe Streets Act for county-controlled streets because it is in accordance with our county's Vision Zero goals, and it recognizes that walking and rolling are legitimate forms of transportation.

People walk every day to run errands, grocery shop, and to access public transportation. Sadly, this commonplace activity is more dangerous than it should be. I could point out painful statistics, but I will offer some of my own experiences to explain the perils pedestrians face. On two separate occasions, I was nearly hit by a car while walking to my election worker shift for the Board of Elections in 2022. The first time was a driver turning right on red, and the second time a driver failed to give me the right of way while making a left turn. When a driver almost hit my friend in a crosswalk while visiting me in Silver Spring, the driver said he did not see my friend because he was looking for other cars. Of course, these incidents pale in comparison to the deaths of Miguel and Ana Ortiz, a married couple killed by a driver while walking to their polling station in Gaithersburg.

The need for the Safe Streets Act is clear. No turns on red lights (NTOR) will limit the all too often common occurrence of drivers not paying attention to pedestrians in the crosswalk. The implementation of Leading Pedestrian Interval (LPI) will give pedestrians time to establish their presence in the crosswalk, thereby reducing the probability of crashes due to drivers not seeing pedestrians. This Council should strengthen the LPI provision of the bill because LPI is a proven and prudent safety measure according to research from the [Federal Highway Administration](#). I strongly support the recommendation from the staff at the Planning Board to [expand the implementation of LPI](#) to areas outside of downtowns and town centers to include schools, parks, and community centers. These locations generate significant pedestrian activity whether it be students walking to school or residents going to vote because many of these locations are also polling stations. Moreover, improving pedestrian infrastructure is another tool to fight [food insecurity](#) in our community. Transportation costs and lack of access to a car play a role in limiting residents ability to buy food or receive help from feeding programs. Improved walkability would help people that want to walk but are faced with unsafe walking conditions.

Enforcement will be important to ensure the Safe Streets Act is not only a dream. There are already places where right on red is banned but drivers ignore or do not see the sign. I strongly urge the Council to hold the County Executive accountable for producing a robust automated enforcement plan of this legislation's provisions. The

County should also consider automatic enforcement or [road calming measures](#) where NTOR and LPI are not possible such as at stop signs and marked crosswalks.

Unfortunately, this legislation cannot rectify the dangerous conditions at state-controlled intersections. The Council should adopt the staff recommendation from the Planning Board to convene a working group of the Montgomery County Department of Transportation and State Highway Administration to explore where NTOR and LPI can be implemented at state-controlled intersections.

I recognize drivers face dangers from other drivers and the design of roads. I also know our community has people who make a living by driving. My grandfather was a taxi driver and his earnings partly funded my education. Although he had an attitude at times behind the wheel, my grandfather said while teaching me how to drive that “wheels yield to feet.” His admonition to me is good advice for everyone. The Safe Streets Act is a way to implement safety for everybody on our streets.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Michael Larkin
Silver Spring, M.D.