

MEMORANDUM

March 15, 2023

TO: Public Safety Committee
Education and Culture Committee

FROM: Essie McGuire, Senior Legislative Analyst
Susan J. Farag, Legislative Analyst

SUBJECT: Update: School Bus Safety

PURPOSE: To receive updated information on school bus safety issues including the school bus camera program, no vote needed.

Those expected to brief the Joint Committee include:

Assistant Chief Marc Yamada, Field Services Bureau, Montgomery County Police Department (MCPD)
Captain Brian Dillman, Director, Traffic Operations Division
Chris Tippery, Director, Automated Traffic Enforcement Division
Mr. M. Brian Hull, Chief Operating Officer
Mr. Damon A. Monteleone, Associate Superintendent, Office of Well-Being, Learning, and Achievement
Mrs. Shauna-Kay J. Jorandby, Director, Student Engagement, Behavioral Health & Academics, Office of Well-Being, Learning, and Achievement
Mr. Gregory S. Edmundson, Director, Student Welfare and Compliance Unit, Office of District Operations
Mrs. Dana E. Edwards, Chief of District Operations

BACKGROUND

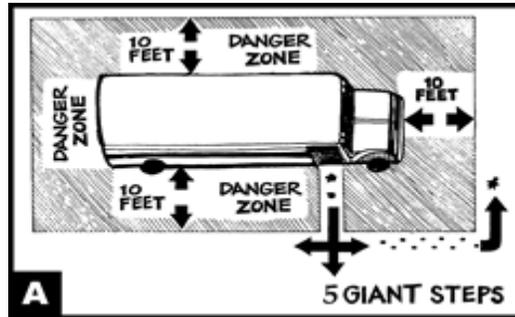
Today the Public Safety and Education and Culture Committees will discuss safety on and around school buses. The Committees will receive updates on the implementation of the school bus camera program, which is used to enhance student safety as children travel to and from school each day.

Taking advantage of State legislation that permits local jurisdictions to implement school bus camera programs, the Council passed legislation in 2012 that allowed the County to implement

its own program. School bus cameras are attached to buses and can photograph and videotape vehicles that pass the stopped bus when it has its red lights flashing and stop sign/arm extended.

State Law

Maryland Transportation Article 21-706 provides that a driver must stop at least 20 feet from the rear of a stopped school vehicle that is operating flashing lights. If the driver is approaching the school vehicle from the front, it must stop at least 20 feet in front of the school vehicle. This requirement keeps other vehicles well outside the identified pedestrian “danger zones” surrounding a school bus as shown in the picture below.



The driver may not proceed until the school vehicle resumes motion or the alternately flashing red lights are deactivated. The exception is if the school vehicle is on a different roadway (i.e. a physical barrier between bus and the driver such as a grass median, jersey barrier, sidewalk, etc.)

- 1 Two-lane roadway:**
When school bus stops for passengers, all traffic from both directions must stop!
- 2 Two-lane roadway with a center turning lane:**
When school bus stops for passengers, all traffic from both directions must stop!
- 3 Four-lane roadway without a median separation:**
When school bus stops for passengers, all traffic from both directions must stop!
- 4 Divided highway of four lanes or more with a median separation:**
When school bus stops for passengers, only traffic following the bus must stop.

State Fines

While the County administers the bus camera program, the enabling legislation and the specific fines are State law. The State enacted enabling legislation in 2011 that permits local jurisdictions to implement school bus camera programs. At that time, the maximum penalty was \$250; the maximum has since been raised to \$500. The Courts have set the current penalty at \$250 for a camera violation. (Council staff notes that the fine can be up to \$570 and a three-point penalty on a driver's license if stopped by a police officer.)

INCIDENT DATA UPDATES

MCPS reported that for the current school year:

- 162 serious incidents occurred on buses out of 148,680 routes run (.001%); and
- No pedestrian incidents involving buses have occurred to date this school year.

MCPD provided the data below on school bus involved accidents, and school bus camera violations.

The table below shows data on bus rider-related accidents, both pedestrian and vehicle related, for last school year and the current school year through December 2022.

Month	Date Range		Grand Total
	Aug 30, 2021 thru Jun 15, 2022	Aug 29, 2022 thru Dec 31, 2022	
January	26		26
February	27		27
March	48		48
April	27		27
May	28		28
June	17		17
August	4	7	11
September	46	33	79
October	33	47	80
November	32	26	58
December	20	26	46
Grand Total	308	139	447

**Note that 19 collision events within the charts time frame involved 2 school buses in a single event.*

For the current school year (through February 24, 2023), MCPD reports a total of 29,303 violations at 4,971 locations. The top five locations were as follows:

Current School Year (through Feb 24)	
Location	# Violations
5100 block of River Road	1,245
8800 block of Colesville Road	1,072
1400 block of East West Highway	997
800 block of University Boulevard East	608
2300 block of Bel Pre Road	328

For last school year (SY2021-2022), MCPD reports a total of 54,766 violations at 6,950 locations. The top five locations were as follows:

Last School Year (SY2021-2022)	
Location	# Violations
5100 block of River Road	1,704
8800 block of Colesville Road	1,225
800 block of University Boulevard East	902
1400 block of East West Highway	680
5400 block of Tuckerman Lane	620

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. It appears that if violations occur at the same pace for the rest of the school year, this school year could end with approximately 7,000 fewer total violations. It may be useful to hear from MCPS and MCPD whether this is consistent with their perceptions of violation patterns this school year, and what factors may be contributing to the decrease.
2. What steps are being taken or can be taken to address areas with high numbers of violations?
3. These high incident areas are large multi-lane roads. Based on the violation data and experience, have MCPS or MCPD identified other specific areas that may have fewer violations but are cause for concern due to other factors?