

Legislation to Formally Implement Speed Limits in School Zones Receives Backing of Lawmakers

Despite strong backing, the bill to protect children near schools faces concerns from lawmakers over funding, fines, and the exclusion of speed-monitoring technology critical to enforcement

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On Tuesday, lawmakers on the Committee of Homeland Security, Justice and Public Safety voted in favor of legislation to establish school speed zones across the Virgin Islands.

According to Senator Angel Bolques Jr., sponsor of Bill 35-0271, the legislation is “designated to protect children in areas close to school by formally establishing school zones” and will codify several existing laws. The bill will provide a “clear, structured framework for regulating traffic and enhancing pedestrian safety,” said Mr. Bolques. He reminded his colleagues of a fatal accident in 2019 involving a student of the John H. Woodson School who was [struck by a vehicle](#)

[and killed](#) on the grounds of the Alfredo Andrews Elementary School.

Tuesday's bill received the overwhelming support of the Department of Planning and Natural Resources which, alongside the V.I. Police Department and Department of Education, is responsible for the overall implementation of the provisions of the bill.

DPW is expected to work with the Department of Education on an aggressive public education campaign to familiarize motorists with the law once enacted. VIDE assistant commissioner Victor Somme III warned lawmakers that "additional funding will be necessary as public education campaigns would need to be ongoing." He suggested allocating "\$100,000 in annual funding" for that purpose. Mr. Somme also emphasized the need for robust enforcement to uphold this law, noting that currently, "enforcement is already stretched thin."

VIPD, for its part, has encouraged the participation of all law enforcement agencies in the enforcement of the school zone speed limits. "The inclusion of multiple law enforcement entities in these efforts ensures the resources are used efficiently and enforcement is consistent across the territory," explained Traffic Commander Joycelyn Lee Bobb. This collaboration is expected to "increase compliance and deter unsafe driving behaviors without overburdening any single agency." VIPD also proposed installing "electronic sentinels" that will capture video and photographic evidence of speeding and reduce the need for boots on the ground.

Data from the VIPD's Office of Highway Safety, representing the year 2024, show a "notable increase in speeding citations issued with proximity to school zone over the past year," according to Ms. Lee Bobb. She said speeding is an "imminent threat to young pedestrians, many of whom may not have the reflexes or awareness to respond to speeding vehicles." VIPD anticipates that capping the speed limit in school zones to 40 miles per hour "can reduce fatalities for pedestrians in these zones by as much as 45%."

All members of the Committee on Homeland Security, Justice, and Public Safety initially felt compelled to support the legislation, but Senators Kenneth Gittens and Novelle Francis ultimately voted against it. Their decision was influenced by an amendment to Bill 35-0271 which removed considerations for the use of technology in enforcing the speed limits in the school zones. The reading of that amendment was waived, meaning the listening public did not get to hear the rationale for removing those considerations.

"We have just emasculated our police department from their crime-fighting arsenal by removing speed cameras and radars, those things as essential to them carrying out their duties," argued Sen. Francis in a point of personal privilege after the vote. Sen. Bolques, the bill's sponsor, promised to reinstate that part of the draft legislation when it is debated within the Committee on Rules and Judiciary. He also promised to present additional amendments, influenced by discussions on the suitability of fines for violations of the provisions of the bill. These fines currently stand as low as \$100 for the first infraction.