

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA  
SESSION 2025

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SENATE BILL 645

Short Title:   The Protect Our Schools Act. (Public)

Sponsors:    Senators Everitt, Bradley, and Grafstein (Primary Sponsors).

Referred to:   Rules and Operations of the Senate

March 26, 2025

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED  
AN ACT DIRECTING THE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION TO IDENTIFY  
SCHOOL WALK ZONES; SETTING LOWER SPEED LIMITS IN SCHOOL WALK  
ZONES; INCREASING CRIMINAL PENALTIES FOR INJURING A MINOR IN A  
CROSSWALK, SCHOOL ZONE, OR SCHOOL WALK ZONE; AND CREATING AND  
APPROPRIATING FUNDS TO THE PEDESTRIAN SAFETY ENHANCEMENT FUND.

The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

**SECTION 1.(a)** This act shall be known as "The Protect Our Schools Act."

**SECTION 1.(b)** G.S. 20-4.01 reads as rewritten:

**"§ 20-4.01. Definitions.**

Unless the context requires otherwise, the following definitions apply throughout this Chapter to the defined words and phrases and their cognates:

...

(38a) School Walk Zone. – An area within a school zone, identified by the Department pursuant to G.S. 20-141.1, that is likely to sustain pedestrian traffic sufficient to render the speed limits designated in G.S. 20-141 unsafe.

...."

**SECTION 1.(c)** G.S. 20-141.1 reads as rewritten:

**"§ 20-141.1. Speed limits in school ~~zones~~ zones and school walk zones.**

(a) Optional Lower Speed Limits. – The Board of Transportation or local authorities within their respective jurisdictions may, by ordinance, set speed limits lower than those designated in G.S. 20-141 for areas adjacent to or near a public, private or parochial school.

(b) Mandatory Lower Speed Limits. – The Department of Transportation shall annually consult with the governing body of each public school unit and each nonpublic school operating pursuant to Part 1 or Part 2 of Article 39 of Chapter 115C of the General Statutes to designate school walk zones. In all designated school walk zones, the Department shall (i) set speed limits lower than those designated in G.S. 20-141 and (ii) ensure appropriate actions are taken to effectuate the reduced speed limit.

(c) Implementation Requirements. – Limits set pursuant to this section shall become effective when signs are erected giving notice of the school ~~zone~~, or school walk zone, the authorized speed limit, and the days and hours when the lower limit is effective, or by erecting signs giving notice of the school ~~zone~~, or school walk zone, the authorized speed limit and which indicate the days and hours the lower limit is effective by an electronic flasher operated with a time clock. Limits set pursuant to this section may be enforced only on days when school is in session, and no speed limit below 20 miles per hour may be set under the authority of this section.

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(d) Penalty. – Unless covered under some other provision of law providing greater punishment, a person who drives who:

(1) Drives a motor vehicle in a school zone or school walk zone at a speed greater than the speed limit set and posted under this section is responsible for an infraction and is required to pay a penalty of two hundred fifty dollars (\$250.00).

(2) Drives a motor vehicle in a school zone or school walk zone without due care resulting in injury to a minor is guilty of a Class 3 misdemeanor."

**SECTION 1.(d)** G.S. 20-173 reads as rewritten:

**"§ 20-173. Pedestrians' right-of-way at crosswalks.**

...

(d) Unless covered under some other provision of law providing greater punishment, a person who drives a motor vehicle in a school zone or school walk zone at a speed greater than the speed limit set and posted under this section is responsible for an infraction and is required to pay a penalty of two hundred fifty dollars (\$250.00). If the violation results in injury to a minor, the person is guilty of a Class 3 misdemeanor."

**SECTION 2.(a)** The Pedestrian Safety Enhancement Fund is established as a special fund within the Department of Transportation to be administered by the Department. The purpose of this fund is to support pedestrian safety initiatives.

**SECTION 2.(b)** Notwithstanding G.S. 143C-5-2, there is appropriated from the Highway Fund to the Department of Transportation for the 2025-2026 fiscal year the sum of ten million dollars (\$10,000,000) in nonrecurring funds to be allocated to the Pedestrian Safety Enhancement Fund established in Section 2(a) of this act. The Department shall allocate these funds as follows:

- (1) Five million dollars (\$5,000,000) for assessing areas likely to be designated school walk zones and for infrastructure improvements within those areas.
- (2) Two million dollars (\$2,000,000) for developing and implementing training for school crosswalk guards.
- (3) Three million dollars (\$3,000,000) to increase public awareness regarding pedestrian safety. This public awareness campaign shall (i) focus on educating the public about pending school walk zones and (ii) promote community engagement to raise awareness and encourage responsible driving in school zones and school walk zones.

**SECTION 2.(c)** This section becomes effective July 1, 2025.

**SECTION 3.** Except as otherwise provided, this act becomes effective December 1, 2025, and applies to offenses committed on or after that date.