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# Montgomery County approves school bus cameras to fine passing drivers

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**The Montgomery County Council voted unanimously on Tuesday to begin installing cameras on school buses to catch and fine drivers who illegally pass buses while they're loading or unloading students.**

The high-resolution, automatic cameras are expected to cost between \$5,000 and \$8,000 apiece, and will be concentrated on buses that drive on Briggs Chaney Road, Clopper Road, Old Columbia Pike and other routes where police have identified high numbers of offending drivers. When caught by the camera, the drivers can be fined up to \$250.

County police issue about 250 citations each year to drivers whom they catch passing a school bus's pop-out stop signs and flashing red lights -- but that's only a small fraction of the incidents that police and school officials believe are going on. On a survey last year, Montgomery County Public Schools bus drivers reported 1,645 infractions in a single day.

"I can't think of a more egregious violation, a more dangerous violation, than passing a school bus that is loading or unloading children," said Police Chief Thomas Manger.

About 98,000 students ride one of more than 1,000 buses to or from county public schools. Montgomery is the third county in Maryland to act on a bill passed by last year's General Assembly allowing for the installation of cameras on the outside of school buses; Frederick and Calvert are piloting programs.

Although the details are still being worked out, Montgomery's cameras will work like red-light cameras, automatically sensing violations and snapping photos. Police will review the footage and are looking to Frederick's program for guidance, officials said Tuesday.

Montgomery schools already maintain 202 external school bus cameras

for research. Bus drivers can hit a button on their dashboards to take a low-resolution photo of offenders, but police can send only warning letters unless they witness the violations firsthand.

Bob Herron, who has been driving county school buses for 21 years, lobbied the County Council to enact legislation. "All it takes is, a student drops a piece of paper or has another student chasing them, and they could run out in traffic," he said.

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