

State House
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Mr. Speaker:

In accordance with Article II, Section 17 of the Maryland Constitution, I have today vetoed House Bill 466.

House Bill 466 would permit the State Highway Administration (SHA) to raise the maximum speed limit on certain federally designated rural interstate divided highways from 55 miles per hour (mph) to 65 mph. The bill would also authorize SHA to raise the speed limit as part of a pilot project to study the impact of the higher speed limit.

The decision of whether to sign or veto House Bill 466 has been difficult for me. I have studied various reports and articles on the 65 mph speed limit, read letters from citizens on both sides of the issue, and discussed the legislation at length with the Superintendent of State Police, the Administrator of SHA, and other State officials. Moreover, on May 21, 1991, I held a veto hearing to give the proponents and the opponents of this legislation an opportunity to present their views directly to me. I commend both the proponents and the opponents of this bill for the time and effort they have devoted to this issue and for the excellent presentations made during the veto hearing.

I realize that many people exceed the current speed limit, but I am unconvinced that raising the speed limit will prevent people from speeding. I believe that if the speed limit is raised to 65 mph, many people will significantly exceed the new, higher limit. Indeed, an Insurance Institute for Highway Safety study found that when the speed limit was increased to 65 mph in Virginia, the number of motorists driving over 70 mph increased dramatically.

After careful consideration of all this material and information, I am convinced that raising the speed limit would result in an increased number of people killed on our rural interstates. Recent studies by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute of actual experience in those states which have raised their speed limits indicate beyond doubt that raising the speed limit to 65 mph does increase the number of fatalities and injuries on our roads.

There is little justification for a pilot project to ascertain the effects of the 65 mph limit; I have no doubt that a pilot program will result in an increase in the number of deaths on our rural interstates. I visited a section of I-95 in Harford County where eight people were killed in two accidents where excessive speed was a major factor in these accidents. I hate to think that accidents such as these would occur as a result of the pilot project. It is a high price to pay when other states have already demonstrated the tragic results of the 65 mph speed limit.

The proponents of a 65 mph speed limit have pointed out that the original reason for lowering highway speed limits to 55 mph was to promote energy conservation. That is still a laudable goal. While safety concerns are my primary reason for vetoing this legislation, the energy savings which are obtained by the 55 mph limit should not be minimized.

My Administration has attempted to promote highway safety through the Drive to Survive