

From: REDACTED

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Subject: RE: SArlMill Drive crossing - a different perspective

South Arlington Mill Drive/ Campbell Ave Crosswalk — A Resident's Observations

Edie,

Thank you for affording me the connection to share my thoughts on the South Arlington Mill Drive crosswalk near Campbell Avenue, where last week's police-involved pedestrian accident took place. I appreciate the opportunity, and I don't take it for granted.

Let me begin where I think we already agree. I am grateful that funding has been approved for safety improvements at this crossing, and I understand the work is on the project list waiting to begin. I am not writing to argue that the crossing needs attention — that case is already won. I am writing because the accident shows why the work should move forward with urgency, and why honest interim enforcement and observation are needed in the meantime.

I also want to say plainly that I feel for the officer involved. I cannot imagine the distress of being part of an accident like that, and I do not believe anyone goes to work intending to harm a pedestrian. But that is exactly why the incident matters. If a trained officer could be drawn forward past a bus that had already come to a full stop — pulled, I suspect, by the green light visible just beyond the crossing — then the problem is larger than any one driver. This is a crossing that sets both pedestrians and drivers up to fail.

I have lived in Shirlington for nearly five years. I cross this area roughly six times a day, seven days a week, walking my dog to and from the park. That is years of repeated, close observation of how drivers behave here. And what I have come to believe is that the most important problem at this crossing is not only one of engineering. It is one of human behavior — and that is the part I most want to put in front of you.

As a registered nurse with twenty-five years of experience, I have spent my career trained to notice patterns in human behavior — the small, repeated things people do without realizing they are doing them. That habit of observation is why this crossing has troubled me for years, and why I cannot let the conversation be only about speed limits and signal timing.

What I have watched, again and again, is that drivers do not respond to every pedestrian the same way. In my daily experience, pedestrians who are people of color,

and pedestrians who are elderly, are more often left standing. They are more often passed by vehicles that should have stopped. They are more often forced into the unsafe position of guessing whether a driver will actually yield before stepping off the curb.

The clearest evidence I have is, uncomfortably, my own. I am a white woman, and I have noticed that when I approach this crossing, vehicles stop more readily for me — and they will stop for me even when a person of color has already been standing there waiting, sometimes after several cars have passed that person by. I am doing nothing different than the pedestrian ahead of me. The only thing that has changed is who the driver sees. Watching a car stop for me that did not stop for the person already waiting is one of the most uncomfortable things I witness here, because it tells me the difference is not the crossing. It is me.

I do not say this to accuse any individual driver of conscious racism, and I want to be careful here — that caution is part of my point. Bias of this kind is rarely loud or deliberate. It shows up quietly: in who a driver notices and who they do not, in who is granted the benefit of safety and who is treated as easier to pass by. It is the kind of thing a community can look right past, precisely because no single moment feels like proof. But for the pedestrians living it, day after day, it is not invisible at all.

This is not only my perception. In the study "Racial Bias in Driver Yielding Behavior at Crosswalks," conducted by Tara Goddard, Kimberly Barsamian Kahn, and Arlie Adkins, researchers found that Black male pedestrians were passed by twice as many cars, and waited thirty-two percent longer, than White male pedestrians before a driver yielded. The study concluded that minority pedestrians experienced discriminatory treatment by drivers at crosswalks. (Link: https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/psy_fac/14/)

That research gives language to what I have feared I was witnessing here. A crosswalk is meant to be one of the simplest civic promises we make to one another: if a person is waiting to cross, drivers stop. But if the likelihood of stopping changes depending on who is standing there, then the danger at this crossing is not shared equally — and a safety plan that ignores that fact will only protect the pedestrians drivers were already most likely to see.

This is also why enforcement here has to be designed honestly, and why it cannot stop at civilian drivers. In my experience, some of the most visible contributors to the problem are not private cars at all. They are Arlington-related vehicles, heavy work trucks, school buses, and — I say this with no satisfaction — law enforcement vehicles. That matters more than it might seem. When residents watch a county vehicle or a police car roll through this crossing without stopping, it quietly teaches

everyone else that stopping is optional. Official vehicles set the standard for the road, whether they intend to or not, and when they fail to yield they grant a kind of tacit permission to every driver behind them.

I often see police positioned on the downhill stretch of Walter Reed Drive coming from King Street, where speeding tickets are presumably easier to issue. I understand why that spot draws enforcement. But from a pedestrian-safety standpoint, South Arlington Mill Drive is where enforcement would actually matter. A visible, sustained effort here could change behavior before someone is killed.

In fact, I think a permanent speed camera at this crossing would likely do more for traffic control than periodic patrols ever could. A camera enforces every hour of every day, without bias and without needing an officer present — and given the sheer level of speeding I see along this corridor, I suspect it would not only change driver behavior but could generate enough revenue to help offset the cost of the safety work itself. The improvements are already funded, but a camera here may well pay for far more than its own installation.

For that effort to be credible, though, it has to include the vehicles most visibly contributing to the problem — and that means not only civilian drivers, but Arlington vehicles, trucks, school buses, and, where necessary, law enforcement vehicles. I understand that ticketing county or police vehicles may be politically or procedurally complicated. But ticketing is not the only tool available. Written warnings, documented stops, supervisor notifications, or internal corrective processes could each serve as the wake-up call. The point is simply that these vehicles cannot be exempt. If enforcement targets only civilian drivers, it will miss one of the clearest patterns at this crossing — and it will quietly confirm the very message that makes the crossing dangerous.

If Arlington does observe or enforce here, I would ask that it be done in a way that can actually reveal what is happening. It would not be enough to watch whether cars stop for one person, on one day, in good light. I would encourage observing whether yielding changes with the pedestrian's race, age, and apparent vulnerability — and one straightforward way to do that would be to have a person of color stand at the crossing in plain clothes while behavior is recorded. Not as a stunt, and not to shame anyone, but to measure the truth: which vehicles stop, which continue, and whether county vehicles, buses, trucks, or police are among those that do not.

I love living in Shirlington. I rarely drive here, because one of the best things about this community is that it is genuinely walkable. But walkability is only real if pedestrians are actually protected — all of them, equally.

The accident could have been far worse, and I worry that without action this crossing will eventually be the site of a fatality rather than a near miss. I am grateful the

improvements have been funded, and my deepest hope is that the work can begin as soon as possible. Until it does, I hope Arlington will consider targeted enforcement, visible warnings, and internal reminders for the county vehicles, buses, trucks, and law enforcement vehicles that use this corridor.

This near tragedy can still become a turning point — but only if we are willing to look honestly at the whole problem: the design, the speed, the driver behavior, and the quiet bias that may decide who is seen at this crossing and who is left waiting at its edge.

Thank you,

A neighbor invested in Shirlington's safety