HOUSE BILL 1204 – TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF THE TRANSPORTATION EQUITY ANALYSES AND ASSURANCES ACT OF 2021

To: Delegate Kumar Barve, Chair
House Environment and Transportation Committee
Delegate Ruth, Bill Sponsor

From: Diane Bell-McKoy, President/CEO, Associated Black Charities

Date: Tuesday, March 9, 2021

Dear Delegates and Committee Members:

Associated Black Charities (ABC) is a public foundation in the State of Maryland. We seek to change the economic outcomes for African American Marylanders through working to eliminate race-based structural and institutional barriers which truncate opportunity and access for those within and/or aspiring to be in the Maryland workforce, and which negatively impact the economic viability of the state. These race-based structural and institutional barriers are found throughout the workforce ecosystem; an ecosystem that includes transportation as an essential linkage to opportunity. This is about a system which in its current configuration and processes remains a barrier to economic opportunities for Black citizens, citizens of color and handicapped citizens.

The very nature of its operations is embedded with systemic racism even if it is not intentional, the outcomes limit access and opportunities for a specific population. Having data clearly enables all systems the ability to examine when their actions disproportionally negatively impact Black people and people of color. ABC develops and urges the use of our Ten Essential Questions for Racial Equity in Public Policy in addition to the specified action in this proposed legislation.

The incorporation of a Racial Equity Lens on every level of policy making is a part of and is essential in "seeding success" for all Maryland communities by working to counteract the unfortunate economic and social legacies of our country's – and this state's – racialized history. Achieving racial equity also produces an economic win for both the individual businesses and our economy.

The Transportation Equity Analyses and Assurances Act of 2021 (HB 1204), the "Transportation Equity Act," shifts equity concerns from the recovery and correction strategies of the past and replaces them with anticipation and prevention strategies. The bill requires prior analyses and studies of the impacts of proposed changes in transportation policies, services, and programs. Had the bill been enacted before June 2015, the Red Line light rail project would not have been cancelled. The draconian cuts in service announced on September 1, 2020 by MDOT MTA would not have been proposed.

Furthermore, we have found that structural racism is fact and data deficient. Prior analyses can expose the misrepresentations inherent in structural racism. The more accurate the data, the less commanding the structural racism.

As ABC explains in its series of Ten Essential Questions for Racial Equity, racial inequities do exist and will continue to persist within institutions unless we use data to examine the policies, practices and culture including the standards for making decisions. One of the initial questions in the Policy Ten Essential Questions is: Does the policy explicitly account for potential racially disparate outcomes? If so, how? If not, how can it be incorporated?

Only data can answer these questions just as when we used data to analyze the impact of COVID on various populations, we immediately uncovered who was disproportionally impacted. If policy seeks to remediate or in the case of this legislation, prevent the negative impact of structural racism on people of color, then we must legislate that specific data is captured and used to make decisions that impact both working citizens, citizens seeking work and employers.

Some of the other key racial equity questions are: "What are the economic and social benefits of incorporating an equity lens in the policy?" "Do the lens and tools for accountability incorporate a racial equity framework and how?" Essentially how would having a transportation system that made access to higher wage employment and ensured daily access to reliable transportation make a difference economically to the State's tax base.

Imagine how the answers to these questions could help "prevent" negative economic outcomes for the State and thus increase the State's economic well-being. Racial equitable policies and practices yield greater economic gains.