

**House Bill 1204 - Transportation Equity Analyses and Assurances Act of 2021  
(Transportation Equity Act)**

**POSITION: SUPPORT**

**Testimony of The Fund for Educational Excellence/Kwane Wyatt**

The Fund for Educational Excellence **strongly supports House Bill 1204**, sponsored by Delegate Sheila Ruth, and we urge the House Environment and Transportation Committee to issue a favorable report on this bill.

Working directly with communities in Baltimore City, it is painfully obvious how years of disinvestment have negatively impacted those who have no choice but to use public transit daily to get to necessary destinations. Over 30,000 Baltimore City Public School students, including 60% of high schoolers, use public transit to get to and from school. Baltimore City's transit systems have higher breakdown rates, less connectivity and lower reliability than the transit systems in most other major metropolitan areas. When considering this, it is likely not a coincidence that Baltimore City Public Schools students have a chronic absenteeism rate of 37%.

School Choice was implemented in Baltimore City in 2005, and 16 years later has not reached its potential. Choice is designed to allow equitable access to quality schools for all students, allowing them to attend any public school within City limits. We quite frankly have a system that families cannot take advantage of due to public transit deficiencies. This strategy cannot be effective if there is no robust transit system working in support of it.

The Transit Safety & Investment Act will mandate that MTA's capital budget be at a level that allows it to address all of the needs identified and get the system back into a state of good repair so that it can operate safely and reliably.

Maryland has a shamefully long history of racist transportation policies, from highways built through and dividing Black communities to the cancelation of the Red Line route, urgently-needed access to jobs for residents in low-income, redlined communities in Baltimore and regional economy-transforming, transit-oriented-development (TOD). Equitable transportation will play a key role in dismantling systemic racism by:

- Increasing access to good jobs, schools, education, and food;
- Providing incentives for community economic development;

- Reducing smog, air pollution, and heat islands, which disproportionately impact Black communities

Transportation equity is also important for people with disabilities. Because many people with disabilities do not have the option to drive cars, lack of access to other modes of transportation disproportionately harms them. Without access to transportation, people with disabilities continue to be alienated from the economic mainstream. People with disabilities are twice as likely to live in poverty in part due to difficulty accessing jobs, education and medical care. Because many individuals with disabilities have increased health care needs, isolation can have a profound impact on quality of life, health, and safety.

The Transportation Equity Act requires:

- Equity as a primary goal in the Maryland Transportation Plan;
- MDOT to collect and analyze data on racial disparities and impact on persons with disabilities in the annual Attainment Report;
- Adding a representative from the Maryland State Conference NAACP to the Attainment Advisory Committee;
- Creation of a Commission on Transportation Equity as an independent transit monitor and evaluator;
- MDOT MTA to conduct transit equity analyses, cost benefit analyses, and outreach to affected communities before public hearings on any major service change;
- MDOT MTA to perform cross-modal equity analysis and planning;
- Increased transparency with annual reporting and service change analysis reporting.

Ultimately, there is a need for greater transparency, accountability and community input. Equity should not be an afterthought or a box to check. Real people's lives are impacted by transportation. All Marylanders, regardless of race, income, zip code, or disability, should have an equal right to the benefits of a well-planned transportation system.

**For these reasons, we strongly support HB 1204 and urge the Committee to issue a favorable report.**