

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

POSITION: SUPPORT

Testimony of Tia Price and Dena Robinson

We, Tia Price and Dena Robinson, **strongly support 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.

Almost three years ago, my partner and I bought a house in the Cares Community. As Black women who grew up in poverty and whose families struggled to maintain adequate housing, buying this house was an incredible milestone. The home we bought and could afford was located in the community we love but on Orleans St. We were not thrilled about the street and also realized that continuing to rent in less than ideal conditions, our previous home had a serious mold issue, was not sustainable.

Our house has been a great refuge and source of pride for us and also has been the source of environmental stress. The traffic on the street is out of control. Cars speed recklessly down our street and the noise is so loud that we cannot hear ourselves talk to our neighbors on the stoop. Speeding semi-trucks often shake our home's walls. The noise pollution makes it nearly impossible to get a good night's sleep.

Our house has also been a source of great pain. Two years ago our beloved dog, Dillon, accidentally ran out of our home and was hit and killed by a driver who was texting on his phone. We love our home, and also frequently think that we need to move. Some day, we hope to have children, and we fear for their safety on this street. Traffic accidents are commonplace, and we fear that our home would be unsuitable for children not only because of the highway in front of our home but also because of the air and noise pollution.

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; and

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 too long, the needs of Black community members have been pushed aside for others' gain. Cars and trucks should not be prioritized over communities, and we respectfully request that MDOT and MTA assess the harm the streets such as Orleans pose to communities and repair the harm that has been done.

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