



**Maryland
Public Health
Association**

Mission: To improve public health in Maryland through education and advocacy

Vision: Healthy Marylanders living in Healthy Communities

**HB284 Vehicle Laws – Dedicated Bus Lanes – Enforcement
Committee: Environment and Transportation
Date: 3/11/2021
Position: SUPPORT**

Dear Chairman Barve, Vice Chairwoman Stein, and members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this letter in SUPPORT of HB284: “Vehicle Laws – Dedicated Bus Lanes – Enforcement”. On behalf of the Maryland Public Health Association, we wish to stress the value of reliable, accessible, and equitable public transit system to public health and healthy communities.

Currently, 30% of Baltimore residents do not have access to privately-owned vehicles.¹ The percentage of households with no vehicle access is greater in historically red-lined and predominately African American communities in Baltimore City (East and West Baltimore City), estimated at greater than 50%.² Residents that lack vehicle access are dependent on public transportation to get to healthcare appointments, work, school, and grocery shopping.

It is estimated that two-thirds of public transit riders experience commute times that are 90 or more minutes each way. Interventions to increase the reliability and accessibility of public transit, such as through dedicated bus lanes, can help to reduce commute times improving social mobility and economic opportunities.

Those living near highways or congested traffic areas bear the health burden of pollution from vehicles. Dedicated public lanes also help to reduce traffic congestion, which in turn reduces air pollution that harms human health and greenhouse gas emissions that worsen climate change. Pollution from gas or diesel-powered vehicles contributes to air pollutants such as particulate matter, nitrogen oxides, and volatile organic compounds. Exposure to air pollution, such as particulate matter, contributes to respiratory and cardiac harm, asthma exacerbations, and premature death. Further, the transportation sector is now the leading cause of greenhouse gas emissions in the US. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions(which reduces other dangerous pollutants) from the bus fleet, improving transit design, and systems in Baltimore can improve health and address climate change.

The benefits of having dedicated bus lanes are reduced from improper utilization of the bus lane by non-authorized vehicles. Strict enforcement is necessary to maintain use and integrity.³ We appreciate that HB284 aims to improve the reliability, speed, and frequency by creating a pathway to enforce dedicated bus lanes traffic lanes, so that the full health benefits of this transit intervention can be realized. Maryland Public Health Association expresses strong support for HB284.

¹ https://www.baltimoresustainability.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/SustainabilityPlan_011019.pdf

² https://www.baltimoresustainability.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/SustainabilityPlan_011019.pdf

³ <https://nacto.org/publication/urban-street-design-guide/street-design-elements/transit-streets/dedicated-curb-side-offset-bus-lanes/>

The Maryland Public Health Association (MdPHA) is a nonprofit, statewide organization of public health professionals dedicated to improving the lives of all Marylanders through education, advocacy, and collaboration. We support public policies consistent with our vision of healthy Marylanders living in healthy, equitable, communities. MdPHA is the state affiliate of the American Public Health Association, a nearly 145-year-old professional organization dedicated to improving population health and reducing the health disparities that plague our state and our nation.