



NATIONAL FEDERATION  
OF THE BLIND  
MARYLAND

*Live the life you want.*

Subject: Support to SB0943 Vehicle Laws – Bus Obstruction Monitoring Systems (Better Bus Service Act of 2024)

From: Members of the National Federation of the Blind of Maryland

To: House Environment and Transportation Committee

Contact: Ronza Othman, President  
National Federation of the Blind of Maryland  
15 Charles Plaza, #3002  
Baltimore, MD 21201  
Phone: 443-426-4110  
Email: [President@nfbmd.org](mailto:President@nfbmd.org)

Date: April 2, 2024

Members of the National Federation of the Blind of Maryland urge the House Environment and Transportation Committee to support SB0943 and to resist amending it to conform with the version E&T previously adopted as HB0107, as the House version perpetuates discrimination against individuals with disabilities. The Senate version of the bill will create a statewide bus lane monitoring system to keep vehicles from parking in bus lanes and block curb cuts, which is critical to independent and safe travel for individuals with disabilities.

The House bill should be amended to conform with the Senate Bill. The House bill has no provision for protection for individuals with disabilities when vehicles obstruct a bus stop and curb cut. It is baffling why E&T would remove those provisions – the most important from the perspective of the disability community, as the rest of the bill is basically meaningless to our community; instead, the House bill not only perpetuates obstruction of bus stops and curb cuts, but removal of coverage for those aspects of public transportation is a tacit agreement to continue to endanger the safety and independent movement of individuals with disabilities. Persons with disabilities have been removed from the House version of the bill, changing the House version from a pro-disability bill to an anti-disability bill. This is a serious problem which you can remedy by conforming the House bill to the Senate bill.

## **THE PROBLEM**

Blind and low vision Marylanders rely on public transportation to get to work, medical appointments, worship services, and other places. The public transportation system in Maryland is riddled with problems, including inconsistent and late fixed route bus service. The impact of these challenges on riders is significant — from losing their jobs to missing dialysis and other critical medical appointments to missing religious services, and more. This problem is exacerbated by drivers who stop, drive, and park in bus lanes, which effectively slow down buses and block access to bus stops for those with disabilities. In addition, many with disabilities can only get on and off buses at a bus stop due to accessibility barriers that exist elsewhere, and those who drive, stop, and park in the bus lane prevent riders with disabilities from being able to access the buses on which those riders depend to move about their communities.

## **PROPOSED ACTION**

The House Environment and Transportation Committee should make sure that the House bill says exactly what the Senate bill says. Discrimination against persons with disabilities must be eliminated.

The House Environment and Transportation Committee must pass the Senate version of the Better Bus Service Act of 2024, which will implement prohibitions on driving, stopping, and parking in dedicated bus lanes state-wide.

## **BACKGROUND**

In 2022, the Maryland General Assembly passed legislation, specific only to Baltimore City, that prohibited drivers from using dedicated bus lanes and established a bus lane monitoring system that captured vehicle information for drivers that violated this law. However, the current legislation expands the prohibition state-wide and clarifies which vehicles are covered. The 2022 law was intended to clear Baltimore City's dedicated bus lanes of non-bus traffic to make sure buses could travel without obstructions. In addition, the law decreased the number of instances when a non-authorized vehicle blocked a bus stop, resulting in passengers with disabilities being able to get on and off buses safely and accessibly. This bill was intended to deter misuse of bus lanes and improve on-time rates for Baltimore City buses while ensuring accessibility for riders with disabilities. The problem persists state-wide, however, and thus the law needs to be expanded throughout Maryland.

Last year WMATA launched its Clear Lanes program to enforce illegal parking at bus stops with bus-mounted cameras. However, this program operates only in Washington, DC and must be turned off when a Metro Bus goes into Maryland. We, in Maryland, deserve the same safety benefits as our neighbors in DC.

Please find enclosed in this testimony, an op ed that was published earlier this session concerning the problems individuals face and why the senate version of the bill should be adopted rather than the House version.

Below is a link to a news story also capturing the problem.

<https://www.wusa9.com/article/news/local/maryland/maryland-delegate-pushing-bill-enforce-illegal-parking-bus-lanes/65-152720a3-bfef-47e9-868a-915100732844>

## **CONCLUSION**

To ensure passengers with disabilities throughout Maryland can get on and off buses safely and without obstruction, and to improve on-time performance of the public transportation system, the House Environment and Transportation Committee should vote in favor of SB0943 and resist amending it like this Committee amended HB0107, which changes the bill from a pro-disability to an anti-disability bill.