

JOTF JOB OPPORTUNITIES TASK FORCE

Advocating better skills, jobs, and incomes

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 368:

Maryland Transit Administration – Funding

TO: Chairwoman Maggie McIntosh, and Members of the Appropriations Committee

FROM: Derrell Frazier, Policy Advocate

DATE: February 4, 2020

The Job Opportunities Task Force (JOTF) is an independent, nonprofit organization that develops and advocates policies and programs to increase the skills, job opportunities, and incomes of low-skill, low-wage workers and job seekers in Maryland. We support House Bill 368 as a means of increasing accessibility and affordability of transportation options for the working families.

In Maryland, it is hard to get to work, or anywhere, without a car. For Maryland's low-wage workforce, the ability to drive is critically important to securing and maintaining employment. We live in a regional economy, where services and jobs are not always located near home. Workers need to be able to travel to and from work, transport their families and manage household responsibilities. Yet, according to the Department of Planning, almost half of all workers in Maryland must travel to another county for their job.

It is well documented that access to affordable and accessible transit options can increase the earning power for low income families, and provide opportunities for their children never before possible. It is also widely believed that the best way out of the current economic environment is to increase individual spending and get more people to back to work. Limitations in mobility ultimately limit the job market for un- and under-employed workers, who can only apply to jobs within reach of public transit, which can be unreliable and, at times, deficient. This leads many workers to rely on securing a driver's license and personal vehicle. Unfortunately, for many of the constituents we serve, the ability to travel to work is constantly jeopardized due to various policies and practices that lead to judgment fees, and is cause for the suspension of their driver's licenses. Thereby limiting their ability to travel to work.

House Bill 0368 would alter and extends (by five years) provisions of the Maryland Metro/Transit Funding Act (Chapters 351 and 352 of 2018) that require increased operating and capital spending for the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA). For fiscal 2023 through 2027, the appropriation for MTA's operating expenses may not be less than the fiscal 2022 appropriation. For fiscal 2022 through 2027, the Governor must include in the State budget an appropriation from the Transportation Trust Fund (TTF) of at least \$500 million for MTA's capital needs. These services provide nearly 320,000 rides a day for residents in Baltimore City and Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Calvert, Charles, Frederick, Harford, Howard, Montgomery, Prince George's, Queen Anne's, and St. Mary's counties.

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An October 2019 Abell Foundation report titled “Scaling Workforce Development Programming in Baltimore” cited transportation as one of the top three systemic drivers that prevent more individuals in Baltimore from accessing job training and ultimately obtaining employment. Specifically, “The lack of reliable and affordable transportation to jobs is one of the greatest obstacles to scaling up training programs. Programs know that they can train and place a greater number of program graduates, but they limit expansion knowing that graduates will be unable to get to their new jobs.” This is why JOTF covers the cost of driver’s education and driver’s improvement courses for students and graduates in our pre-apprenticeship construction training program, Project JumpStart, and why every graduate placed into employment has access to up to \$2500 towards a personal automobile.

Mobility is the key to getting ahead, and workers must have access to affordable, efficient transportation options. **For these reasons, we urge a favorable report of House Bill 368.**