

# ADVOCATES

FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

To: Chair McIntosh and members of the Appropriations Committee  
From: Shamoyia Gardiner, Education Policy Director  
Re: House Bill 368: Maryland Transit Administration – Funding (Transit Safety and Investment Act)  
Date: February 4, 2020  
Position: Support

A 2017 study by the Baltimore Education Research Consortium (BERC) shed light on a massive problem faced by high school students in Baltimore City in their efforts to graduate: an insufficient public transportation infrastructure. While Baltimore City Public Schools has undertaken initiatives to address chronic student absenteeism and disengagement from school like the Blueprint for Student Success, BCPS is limited in its capacity to solve for the barriers posed by the Maryland Transit Administration's inefficiencies and under-resourcing. The state of Maryland must step up to address this critical gap in need and service.

Proposed cuts to transit funding as outlined by the Maryland Department of Transportation's Consolidated Transportation Program would leave the students of Baltimore City, some 34,000 of whom rely on public transportation to get to and from school<sup>1</sup>, on literal and metaphorical islands. For 60% of Baltimore City's high school students, an already complicated commute would become nearly impossible.

Concerns cited by students include buses being consistently late; multiple transfers required to reach a destination; overcrowded buses, which often skip stops; long commutes which average 36 minutes and could extend to three hours; a lack of safety, particularly early in the morning or after dark; subjectivity to weather conditions like extreme cold or heat; and challenging last stop-to-school commutes.<sup>23</sup> BERC also found that **if all students who rely on MTA attempted to get to school on time, the system would not have the capacity to meet demand. In effect, our current transit operation isn't just failing to set Baltimore City students up for success—it assumes and is dependent upon their failure.**

The complications posed aren't experienced equally by all students across the city, however. Because Baltimore City operates a universal choice secondary education program, **students who live further away from highly-desired schools than their peers are less likely to attend and graduate from those schools, even if they achieve at a high academic standard.** This means that students who live in the south Baltimore neighborhoods of Cherry Hill, Curtis Bay, and Brooklyn, where high schools have limited

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<sup>1</sup> Lue, Charisse. *Combating Chronic Absenteeism by Improving Public Transportation*. University of Baltimore. March 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Baltimore Education Research Consortium. *Getting to High School in Baltimore: Student Commuting and Public Transportation*. January 2017.

seats available, will face more difficulty in earning a diploma from the high-performing high schools located in other parts of the city than their peers who live in Belair-Edison. This also poses an additional barrier for Hispanic/Latinx students living in Highlandtown who are working to ensure that they are not segregated into one high school located near their neighborhood. Doing nothing will not solve this problem—the new **BaltimoreLINK system connects students to the same number of schools as its predecessor, only serving to re-entrench barriers to opportunity for the city’s students and amplifying the echoes of racist redlining policies.**<sup>4</sup>

As the General Assembly prepares to make an historic investment in the students, schools, and communities of Maryland, it is imperative that we take a long view—what good are new school buildings, highly-qualified teachers, fully-staffed schools, and wrap-around services if students never make it in the front door? **We can’t truly say that we’re creating a world-class system of public education if thousands of students won’t have real access to it.** For the above reasons and because inaction is not an option, **ACY strongly urges a favorable report on this bill.**

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<sup>4</sup> Central Maryland Transportation Alliance. *Are We Better Off? Assessing BaltimoreLink’s Promises One Year Later*. 2018.

*Advocates for Children and Youth builds a strong Maryland by advancing policies and programs to ensure children of every race, ethnicity, and place of birth can achieve their full potential.*