

Testimony on HB 368
Maryland Transit Safety & Investment Act
House Committee on Appropriations
February 4, 2020

Favorable

Disability Rights Maryland (DRM) is the state's protection and advocacy system, mandated to advance the rights of people with disabilities. Transportation plays a key role in the struggle for civil rights and equal opportunity in the disability community. Affordable and reliable transportation allows people with disabilities access to education, employment, health care, housing, and community life. According to a report from the Center for Disease Control, adults with disabilities are twice as likely as those without disabilities to have inadequate transportation. Over thirty percent of households in Baltimore City are non-vehicle. Public transit is the sole option for many people with disabilities. Denying people with disabilities access to public transportation violates their civil rights and keeps them from making valuable contributions to our society. DRM supports a robust and adequately funded public transit system.

DRM has particular knowledge about MTA's paratransit system, having been involved with paratransit riders for twenty years and involved in two systemic lawsuits for violations of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Individuals who cannot access other public transit options due to their disabilities rely on paratransit service. In the Baltimore area many bus stops do not provide areas to sit and wait for a bus or to be protected from inclement weather. Bus stops may not have adequate curb cuts or accessible sidewalks. Improvements in access could decrease reliance on paratransit services, although the disabilities of numerous individuals will prevent them from being able to use the MTA bus system.

This year disruptions in paratransit services have been severe. On time performance fell to service levels below what is acceptable by the Federal Transit Administration. Similarly, telephone response time has been insufficient and there were instances when riders could not obtain any response from the service, leaving them uncertain as to whether rides would come for them and unable to book rides. .

According to the MTA's 2019 Capital Needs Inventory, in 2017 MTA paratransit provided **2 million rides**. However, this past year this service provided approximately **3 million rides**. It is the fastest growing public transit sector. This calculus was not part of the CNI. Secretary Pete Rahn recently testified at a committee hearing in November, that there are no plans to acquire more vehicles and he determined that \$9 million in appropriated capital funds to do so were not necessary. . This despite the fact that two years ago, the legislative analyst pointed out that **MTA has historically underfunded paratransit services and the MTA fiscal 2019 budget shows a pattern of flat funding that is both unusual compared with past years and more pronounced than in any of the other Maryland Department of Transportation units.**

The consequences of people being ill served are serious: dialysis patients not getting life needed treatments, people waiting for 3-6 hours for rides, day programs for people with disabilities not able to ensure people get home timely for medications and support staff services, jobs at risk or not obtainable, and school classes missed. You have heard it before. These are not isolated instances, they are the result of a system, which can and must do better. Thank you for your time and consideration.



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