

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

My name is Michael Gerlach. I am the former chairman of the MTA Citizen's Advisory Committee for Accessible Transportation . I am also the former chairman of the Consumers For Accessible Ride Services committee, a paratransit advocacy committee under DRM. I am visually impaired, and I am a Mobility rider.

I have been a strong advocate for paratransit riders for about 10 years now and do you know what I have seen accomplished in those 10 years? hardly anything that MTA has promised. When dealing with MTA, I feel as though I am on an out of control merry-go-round going in circles with no end to the ride in sight.

I have lived and travelled in many different states across the country due to my job with the FBI. I have used paratransit systems in those states where I have lived and travelled and I can unequivocally testify to the fact that Mobility is one of the worst paratransit systems I have ever used.

Because of their poor track record, When waiting for a ride, I sit and wonder just how badly they are going to screw up my ride and possibly my whole day. There is no reason why a person's anxiety level and blood pressure should raise as a result of using a transportation provider, but this is what happens when I have to use Mobility.

Whereas, I am giving some personal examples, I speak for thousands of riders who feel the same way that I do and experience the same things on a daily basis. This is just some of what we, the riders, put up with:

1. A serious lack of adequate vehicle representation for the number of riders using the system,
2. Rude customer service when contacting Mobility to make reservations or to check on rides,
3. A communication system that fails at least 4 or 5 times a year stranding riders in inclement weather and sometimes unsafe areas for hours with no way of contacting Mobility,
4. A ride scheduling program that, in many cases, makes absolutely no sense at all. Keeping riders on a vehicle well past one or more hours and in some cases keeping them on the vehicle riding back and forth from one side of town to another.

For as long as I can remember, Mobility has operated on a budget that remains unchanged as the number of people using the system increases annually. many of these said factors could be made better by providing an adequate budget to:

1. Purchase additional vehicles to keep up with the increasing ridership.
2. Provide customer service training to teach call center operators how to treat people properly and with courtesy.
3. Install a communication system across the board that works better than 2 cans and a piece of string.

4. Provide the funding necessary to upgrade their scheduling software so that people can get home in a timely fashion so they can spend time with their loved ones before they grow old.

Again, I want to reiterate that while ridership on Mobility continues to grow at a staggering rate, the money that is allocated to run the system stays at an anemic percentage of what is truly needed to provide the world class customer service that MtA brags that they provide.

If what they currently provide is world class service, I hate to think about what world they are talking about and what that world looks like.

Please give a favorable decision to help improve the funding needed to allow Mobility to provide better service to a population that needs this lifeline.

Thank you for your consideration,

Michael Gerlach