

**Testimony on SB 424**  
***Maryland Transit Safety & Investment Act***  
**Senate Budget and Taxation Committee**  
**February 12, 2020**

Favorable

Disability Rights Maryland (DRM) is the state's protection and advocacy system, mandated to advance the rights of people with disabilities. DRM supports a robust and adequately funded public transit system. Transportation plays a key role in the struggle for civil rights and equal opportunity in the disability community. 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. Affordable and reliable transportation allows people with disabilities access to education, employment, health care, housing, and community life.

DRM has particular knowledge about MTA's paratransit system, having been involved with paratransit riders for years and with 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.

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 and telephone response time has similarly been inadequate. There were instances when riders could not obtain any response from the service, leaving them unable to book rides and uncertain as to whether rides would come. Travel times can be exhausting.

The MTA's 2019 Capital Needs Inventory uses 2017 data to identify that paratransit provided **2 million rides**. However, this past year paratransit 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 House Appropriations Committee hearing in November 2020, 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 unusual compared with past years and more pronounced than in any of the other transit 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. Resources are needed. Thank you for your time and consideration.

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