



February 1, 2021

**Testimony on HB 114 –
Maryland Transit Safety & Investment Act
Appropriations**

Position: Favorable

The Fund for Educational Excellence supports HB 114, the Transit Safety & Investment Act.

In July 2019, the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) released its first ever Capital Needs Inventory (CNI) to assess its ongoing, unconstrained capital needs. The CNI identified \$5.7 billion of capital needs over the next ten years, \$1.5 billion of which is an accumulated backlog of deferred maintenance. Unfortunately, MDOT's FY 2021–2026 Consolidated Transportation Program (CTP) does not provide the MTA sufficient funding to address the annual maintenance and repairs identified in the CNI. In fact, at current funding levels the maintenance backlog will grow.

The result of the neglected maintenance is buses, light rail vehicles, subway trains and commuter trains that break down more often than the MTA's peer agencies, and in some cases, more often than any transit agency in the nation. This leads to poor service which leads to drops in ridership, and a negative spiral.

In addition to the drop in ridership, this level of disinvestment also negatively impacts those who have no choice but to use public transit daily to get to necessary destinations. Over 30,000 Baltimore City Public School students, including 60% of high schoolers, use public transit to get to and from school. Baltimore City's transit systems have higher breakdown rates, less connectivity and lower reliability than the transit systems in most other major metropolitan areas. When considering this, it is likely not a coincidence that Baltimore City Public Schools students have a chronic absenteeism rate of 37%.

School Choice was implemented in Baltimore City in 2005, and 16 years later has not reached its potential. Choice is designed to allow equitable access to quality schools for all students, allowing them to attend any public school within City limits. We quite frankly have a system that families cannot take advantage of due to public transit deficiencies. This strategy cannot be effective if there is no robust transit system working in support of it.

The Transit Safety & Investment Act will mandate that MTA's capital budget be at a level that allows it to address all of the needs identified and get the system back into a state of good repair so that it can operate safely and reliably.

We encourage a FAVORABLE report for this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Kwane Wyatt

Kwane Wyatt
Program Director
Fund for Educational Excellence