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Committee: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Testimony on: SB0137 - Maryland Transit Administration – Conversion to Zero–Emission Buses (Zero–Emission Bus Transition Act)

Position: Favorable

Hearing Date: January 28, 2021

Bill Contact: Senator Craig Zucker

DoTheMostGood (DTMG) is a progressive grass-roots organization with more than 2500 members who live in a wide range of communities in Montgomery and Frederick Counties, from Bethesda near the DC line north to Frederick and from Poolesville east to Silver Spring and Olney. DTMG supports legislation and activities that keep all the members of our communities healthy and safe in a clean environment. DTMG strongly supports SB0137 because it will help Maryland meet its greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction goals and address the existential threat of climate change.

GHG emissions are a driving factor in climate change due to global warming. Transportation is one of the largest contributors of GHG emissions in Maryland, with gasoline and diesel vehicles accounting for more than 36% of our total GHG emissions per year, according to the Maryland Greenhouse Gas Inventory. In order to reduce the impacts of climate change, Maryland must rapidly reduce its GHG emissions. Electrification of the transit bus fleet is an essential strategy in achieving the necessary GHG emission reduction.

Advances in electric bus technology and a rapid decline in battery costs over recent years have made electric buses an increasingly viable option for many transit agencies and school districts. To facilitate the rollout of electric buses and ensure that communities see the benefits of these vehicles, the US Public Interest Research Group (US PIRG) recommends that state and city officials commit to a full transition to electric buses on a specific timeline and create favorable utility rate structures for transit agencies that include reduced off-peak energy rates and limited demand charges.

SB0137 directly addresses the first PIRG recommendation. SB0137 will prohibit the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) from entering into a contract to purchase buses that are not zero–emission buses for the State fleet beginning in fiscal year 2023. SB0137 will also require an annual report to include a schedule for converting the State transit fleet to exclusively zero–emission buses, an evaluation of necessary charging infrastructure, a plan for transitioning adversely affected State employees, an estimate of the potential emission reductions, and an analysis of projected costs.

The commitments in SB0137 will help grow the market, drive technological innovation, and enable transit agencies to gain the benefits of economies of scale in maintenance facilities, operational experience and electricity pricing.

Although purchasing zero emission buses is more expensive in the short-term, there are a number of longer-term benefits. Clean and reliable bus transit will have health and economic benefits, particularly for the residents of Baltimore. Nearly half the population of Baltimore lacks access to a car and the 80 bus lines serving Baltimore provide a critical means of transportation to work, school, grocery stores, and medical appointments. Transitioning from diesel to zero-emission buses will reduce air pollution and smog and result in health benefits for all Baltimore residents.

In addition, electric buses have reduced operation and maintenance requirements and therefore lower long-term overall costs. Several US cities have demonstrated the advantages of all-electric bus fleets: According to US PIRG, Seneca, SC became the first city in the world to launch an all-electric bus fleet in 2014. The buses have outperformed their previous diesel buses in fuel and maintenance costs, and exceeded expectations about charging time, range and battery life. The all-electric bus fleet in Chicago demonstrates that all-electric buses perform well in cold weather, and the fleet saves the Chicago Transit Authority more than \$50,000 per year in fuel and maintenance costs. After a pilot test of electric buses, King County Washington committed to purchasing only zero-emission buses in 2020 and will transition to a fully zero-emission fleet by 2040.

These same benefits can accrue to bus riders and residents across Maryland if SB0137 is enacted. Conversion of the MTA transit bus fleet to electric buses will also improve reliability and reduce operation and maintenance costs over time.

Therefore, DTMG strongly supports and urges a **FAVORABLE** report on this SB0137.

Respectfully submitted,

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