Committee: Environment and Transportation
Testimony on: HB334 - "Maryland Transit Administration – Conversion to Zero-Emission Buses (Zero-Emission Bus Transition Act)"
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: February 12, 2021

Ladies and gentlemen of the committee, on behalf of the 700+ members of Indivisible Howard County, we strongly urge a favorable report on HB 334 to convert the Maryland Transportation Administration (MTA) bus fleet to zero-emission vehicles.

This bill provides for a phase-in of zero-emission buses for the MTA bus fleet by prohibiting MTA from purchasing any non-zero emission buses beginning in fiscal year 2023, along with providing a plan for transitioning any state workers adversely affected by the change-over. It also requires the MTA provide an annual report to the General Assembly detailing the progress toward full implementation of the bill's provisions.

Transportation is Maryland's number one generator of greenhouse gas emissions, the main cause of global climate change. And as you know, tailpipe emissions contribute to ozone pollution which results in failure to meet federal clean air standards for more than 80% of Maryland residents.

Compared to conventional diesel buses, each zero-emission bus can eliminate almost 1,700 tons of carbon dioxide, ten tons of nitrogen oxides, and 350 pounds of diesel particulate matter over a 12-year period.

Fossil fuel-powered and hybrid electric buses are significant sources of pollutants other than greenhouse gases. Diesel exhaust contains more than 40 toxic air contaminants that in some cases can cause and/or worsen diseases such as asthma and cancer. ***From an environmental justice perspective, communities of color and low-income neighborhoods that rely on public transportation face disproportionate health risks due to poor air quality from particulate matter emissions***.

The state has a goal of having 300,000 electric vehicles (EV's) on the road by 2025, and 600,000 EVs on the road by 2030. The environmental advantages of having more electric passenger cars on the road fully extends to electrifying MTA's fleet of approximately 700 buses. Consequently, when it comes time each year for MTA to replace a portion of its transit bus fleet, it makes eminent sense to require that all new buses be zero emissions.

Electric buses are more cost-effective in the long term than diesel buses because of their lower operational and maintenance costs. Electricity that must be generated to charge electric bus batteries increasingly comes from renewable wind and solar power sources, and the percent of clean, renewable energy generated will continue to increase over time.

In summary, this bill would take a critically important step forward for our state in combating the climate crisis while helping to improve the health of Marylanders by improving air quality.

We urge the Committee to issue a favorable report.

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