



March 8, 2022

**Testimony on HB 1336 –
Greater Baltimore Transit Governance and Funding Commission –
Appropriations**

Position: FAVORABLE

The Fund for Educational Excellence supports HB 1336.

Leaders in the Greater Baltimore region are seeking to reform the way public transportation is governed and financed. Structural challenges in the current centralized governance structure of the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) make maintaining and improving transit performance difficult. The result is an unreliable public transportation system that further disadvantages many users already negatively impacted by poverty and structural racism, discourages ridership growth and puts the region at a competitive disadvantage compared to other metropolitan areas with robust, reliable public transit.

Moreover, the lack of local participation in planning and funding decisions has been a contributing factor to ongoing maintenance problems (MTA buses and trains have some of the highest breakdown rates in the nation) and lack of significant expansion or improvement (last expansion of the system was in 1997). Of the 50 largest transit agencies in the country, the MTA is the only one that is part of a state department of transportation without a board of directors and where decision-making lies solely with a governor.

Baltimore City Public Schools students are the only students in the State of Maryland who rely on MTA public transit to get to and from school. There are 29,000 Baltimore City Public School students, including 60% of high schoolers, using 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%. Frequent, reliable, and accessible transit is inextricably tied to the success of Baltimore's students and families, and they deserve a quality transit system.

HB 1336 creates a governance and funding commission representative of key regional and state stakeholders to answer key questions on how to create a new Baltimore Regional Transportation Authority. Informed by the commission's findings, the General Assembly will then be able to draft authorizing legislation to make that authority a reality. We believe that reforming the current system and creating that authority is a critical step for improving and expanding transit service, increasing oversight and accountability, and bringing additional local and federal funds for transit to the region.

We respectfully encourage a favorable report.



Sincerely,
Ruth Farfel

Ruth Farfel
Manager—Analysis and Engagement
Fund for Educational Excellence