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Budget and Taxation Committee

Health and Human Services Subcommittee

Pensions Subcommittee

Vice Chair
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The Senate of Maryland
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

TESTIMONY OF SENATOR SHELLY HETTLEMAN
SB617

Maryland Transit Administration- Fare Price Requirements-Alterations

Affordable public transportation is critical to the health and wellbeing of Marylanders. Unfortunately, our state's transportation fares continue to increase, with low-income and Black riders disproportionately bearing the burden of these costs.

Equitable access to reliable transportation options provides for access to opportunities and contributes to inclusive economic growth. Our transit system has been historically underfunded and lacks the infrastructure it needs to support those who rely on it most in their everyday lives. Our current transit system includes more than 50 local bus lines, light rail, the Baltimore Metro subway, commuter buses, MARC trains, and mobility/paratransit vehicles. The ability to travel to school, work, the grocery store, or a doctor's appointment, should be afforded to all Marylanders.

More than half of MTA bus riders earn less than \$25,000 per year and bus riders account for 80% of MTA users. A large proportion of Core Bus riders are people of color. 83% of Core Bus riders are Black, as well as 70% of SubwayLink riders, and 52% of Light RailLink riders. The current mandated transit fare increases disproportionately impact low-income Black MTA riders who are expected to pay these rising costs.

The MTA has been required to increase base fares beginning in 2015. Core service fares are required to be adjusted every two years and commuter services adjusted every five based on the Consumer Price Index and other factors. Since the bill repeals the mandated inflationary metric fare increases, the revenues resulting from those fare increases would be foregone. Under SB617 however, MTA would still have the authority to modify transit fares as needed after a public hearing is held, giving the administration flexibility to modify transit fares to raise revenue when appropriate.

While Maryland currently mandates fare increases, other cities and states are exploring fare reductions or eliminating fares altogether for transit. It is critical that we continue to work to find long-term solutions and implement regional strategies to enhance funding and revenue streams for transit operations.

This bill would promote a more reliable, equitable transit system by lowering the cost burden to promote mobility especially for transit-dependent riders.

I urge a favorable report on SB 785, and I thank you for your consideration.