

JOTF JOB OPPORTUNITIES TASK FORCE

Advocating better skills, jobs, and incomes

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 0491: Baltimore Regional Transit Commission - Establishment

TO: Chair Ben Barnes and Members of the House Appropriations Committee

FROM: Ioana Stoica, Policy Advocate

DATE: Friday, February 17, 2023

The Job Opportunities Task Force (JOTF) is an independent, nonprofit organization that develops and advocates policies and programs to increase the skills, job opportunities, and incomes of low-wage workers and job seekers in Maryland. **JOTF strongly supports House Bill 0491 as a means of expanding transit access to low-income communities, particularly to residents of color, by taking the first step towards putting Baltimore City transit under local control.**

Mobility is key in Maryland's regional economy, and the lack of transportation is a significant barrier to employment and to access to critical services such as childcare, healthcare, and grocery stores. And while most Marylanders have some access to a car, research shows that low-income workers, as well as workers of color, are more likely to use public transportation. In Baltimore City, for example, 88% of homeowners have access to a car, but only 57% of renters have access to a car.

Lack of access to public transit by workforce participants that the Job Opportunities Task Force serves has been exacerbated by the redirection of funds from public transportation projects to those prioritizing highway projects serving predominantly white or high-income neighborhoods. The most stark example of this has been the canceling of Red Line work by Governor Hogan in 2015 - a decision that local control of Baltimore City transit may have prevented altogether.

JOTF has been following the work of the Baltimore Regional Transportation Board, submitted letters of support in favor of a Baltimore Regional Transit Authority and has been working closely with members of the Transform Maryland Transportation Coalition on this issue. We imagine a robust, equitable, sustainable transportation system in Maryland, but mounting evidence indicates that the way we govern and finance public transportation in Greater Baltimore is flawed. Riders, educators and employers say that transit is too inefficient and too unreliable. Underinvestment by Maryland's Governors and Department of Transportation has led to equipment breakdowns and worker shortages that undercut service and hurt riders.

The clear answer to us is establishing a Baltimore Regional Transit Authority to govern and finance public transportation in the region, and this bill is a first step in this process. **For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on House Bill 491.**

For more information, contact:

Ioana Stoica / Policy Advocate / ioana@jotf.org / 240-643-0059