



THE PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY GOVERNMENT

OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

BILL: Senate Bill 693 - Assaults on Public Transit Service Operators - Reports

SPONSOR: Senator Waldstreicher

HEARING DATE: March 1, 2023

COMMITTEE: Judicial Proceedings

CONTACT: Intergovernmental Affairs Office, 301-780-8411

POSITION: SUPPORT

The Office of the Prince George's County Executive **SUPPORTS Senate Bill 693 - Assaults on Public Transit Service Operators - Reports**, which would require the Maryland Transit Administration to submit annual reports on assaults on public transit operators to the following: (1) the local executive authority of each county; (2) the State's Attorney for each County; (3) the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee; (4) Senate Finance Committee; and (5) the House Judiciary Committee. **Senate Bill 693** also requires the report to include information on the nature of each assault, the mode of transit involved, the location of the assault, whether the police were involved in responding to the assault, and the outcome of any investigation.

The Prince George's County Department of Public Works and Transportation (DPW&T) operates TheBus fixed-route and Call-A-Bus paratransit systems, and public transit services open to all County residents. DPW&T's transit services are located at 8401 D'Arcy Road, Forestville, MD 20747. In 2021 DPW&T served 905,056 riders. TheBus has experienced an increase of over 400% in bus operator assaults in 2021 versus 2020. Although, we have been fortunate to not have severe or fatal incidents, operators have become victims of more harsh and sometimes violent behavior.

DPW&T uses every available resource to provide safe reliable service and has made great efforts to train our drivers to avoid conflict. However, occurrences of assault against drivers have been both increasing and escalating in nature. According to the Federal Transit Administration's National Transit Database, assaults on transit operators have increased fourfold since 2009. An average of 174 operator assaults that the Federal Transit Administration considers "major incidents" occurred each year during that period, according to the government database. In Maryland, we have seen three shooting deaths of bus drivers in the City of Baltimore in less than a year.

Assaults on drivers not only endanger the driver but also put the lives of other passengers and pedestrians at risk as drivers are forced to confront attacks while trying to safely operate their vehicles. Providing for the mandated reporting of violence against transit operators will allow the

Maryland General Assembly to enact penalties that will be an effective deterrent and numerous localities and states have already enacted stiffer penalties for such incidents.

According to a Transportation Association of Maryland member survey conducted in 2020, 53% of Maryland transit organizations have experienced multiple physical assaults in the previous year and over three out of four describe their drivers as regularly experiencing verbal threats and intimidation.

According to the Transit Cooperative Research Program, sponsored by the Federal Transit Administration, operator assaults can have significant consequences for the victimized operators, for their coworkers and families and for bus operations in the form of injury-related claims, absences, diminished productivity, and union grievances. Operators may experience increased levels of anxiety and stress, which can cause them to become distracted while on duty or less calm under pressure. When asked about issues experienced by bus operators or operations as a result of violence against bus operators, 68% of the 50 respondents to this question reported that they have had injury related claims, and more than half reported that their operators showed increased anxiety and stress. Twenty-eight percent reported that their bus operations were affected by absenteeism and diminished productivity and 20% reported union grievances. Small agencies were less likely to report that their operators have been showing increased anxiety or stress. Larger agencies tended to report more injury-related claims and absenteeism or diminished productivity than midsize agencies, and midsize agencies were more likely to report absenteeism or diminished productivity than small agencies.

For the reasons stated above, the Office of the Prince George's County Executive **SUPPORTS Senate Bill 693** and asks for a **FAVORABLE** report.