



Bill: Senate Bill 693: Transportation – Assaults on Public Transit Operators – Report
Position: SUPPORT

Dear Chair Smith, Vice-Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Committee:

I write on behalf of the Transportation Association of Maryland. support of Senate Bill 693, which would require additional reporting and state assistance on behalf of transit operators who daily face the risk of assault.

Our members represent every local jurisdiction operating transit service in Maryland, and the concerns that both they and their drivers have expressed to us are many. Many drivers feel that they are targets as a result of their positions, where they operate alone, strapped into a seat, handling money, and expected to enforce compliance on a variety of rules. According to a TAM 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.

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.

Operator assaults can have significant consequences for the victimized operators, 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. A recent study by New York’s MTA shows that harassment of MTA bus drivers accounts for three-quarters of all transit worker assaults in recent years, including threats and spitting, among other offenses.

SB 693 creates a long overdue statewide database of driver assaults. We approve especially of the requirement that the MTA recommend best practices in technology and assault prevention to local systems, and encourage the study and eventual adoption of a statewide local transit safety officer to provide guidance.

Drivers provide a unique and critical public service. Assaults against them are not only injuries to a private citizen, they are attacks upon the passengers they transport and the community they serve. This is a problem that deserves the fullest attention of the Maryland Transit Administration.

We fully support Senate Bill 693’s efforts to study this problem and provide support to local transit operators.

Sincerely,

John Duklewski
Executive Director, Transportation Association of Maryland