



**Testimony Supporting SB0019/HB0009**  
**Senate Finance / House Environment & Transportation**  
**Committee**  
**February 1, 2023**

Position: **SUPPORT**

### **Transportation Equity Act**

My name is Carlos Orbe. I am the Public Affairs Specialist for Maryland Latinos Unidos (MLU), an association housed at MD Nonprofits of over 300 Latino community leaders, business owners, and Latino-led nonprofits. MLU's mission is to unify efforts across the state to advocate and organize for the benefit of Maryland's Latino community. Our vision is that the Latino community in Maryland thrives, achieves excellence, innovates, and continually makes progress economically, socially, and environmentally. We utilize data-driven and evidence-based approaches to build coalitions to advocate and create a space for every Latino to have a voice. In doing so, we look to create or advocate for a network of resources to support Latino-initiated initiatives that positively impact the community overall. For these reasons, I am writing to express my support for the Transportation Equity Act, SB0019/HB0009, sponsored by Senator Jill Carter and Delegate Sheila Ruth, which will put equity at the forefront of Maryland transportation planning and ensure equitable access to transportation for all Marylanders.

Redirecting funds from a public transportation project that would serve neighborhoods with high percentages of Black and Brown residents should be unlawful. Furthermore, redirecting said funds to road and highway projects serving predominantly white populations exacerbates disparities in accessibility to jobs and other destinations based on race. We can begin by addressing the construction failure of the Red Line. Had this project gone through, it would have improved Baltimore's public transit system wide, provided crucial east-west connectivity, and gotten more automobiles off the road in neighborhoods with high rates of air pollution. However, this project was canceled by Governor Larry Hogan in 2015, and the funds were re-appropriated to repair roads in majority white communities - something that the Transportation Equity Act would prevent from happening again. These inequitable decisions made by leadership both directly and indirectly have a negative impact on minority communities and the world at large within three major elements.

From an **economy and equity perspective**, Two-thirds of transit-dependent people in Baltimore face commutes of 90 minutes or more each way. Commuting time is one of the biggest factors to a person's chances of escaping poverty: the longer the commute, the harder it is to maintain a job, keep stable housing, and accumulate wealth. Low-income households are less likely to own cars and are more dependent on public transportation. MTA should be required to publicly report data on racial disparities and disparate impacts on persons with disabilities, and this bill would require that. MTA should be required to conduct transit equity analyses, cost benefit analysis, and outreach to affected communities before public hearings on any major proposed service change and/or capital project. Many people with disabilities lack access to cars, which impacts access to employment, education, health care services, and social activities. Lack of access to transportation is a major barrier to community inclusion, according to the National Council on Disability.

**Public health perspective:** There are indirect consequences that immediately put minority communities at risk that depend on an equitable travel solution. Emissions from transportation are significant contributors to local air quality problems. It's estimated that 28% of nitrous oxides in the atmosphere come from on-road gasoline use – and unlike emissions from power plants, these occur right at head-level in close proximity to pedestrians, bikers, and drivers. A report by the American Public Transportation Association examined the emissions and greenhouse gases of different modes of transportation, and found, unsurprisingly, that public transit emits less air pollution than equivalent car use. Per passenger-mile traveled, the study found that public transit produces only 5% as much carbon monoxide (a poisonous gas that hampers the body's ability to transfer oxygen to organs and tissues) as car use. Likewise, public transit produces 8% as much Volatile Organic Compounds and less than 50% as much nitrogen oxides emissions as car use. These chemicals, combined with sunlight and heat, produce ozone and smog. Ozone can irritate people's respiratory systems and eyes, damage their lungs, and exacerbate many respiratory conditions. According to "Transit Equity and Environmental Health in Baltimore," a 2021 report by researchers at Johns Hopkins University and the Baltimore Transit Equity Coalition: "Studies show that air quality on average is worse in black neighborhoods, and black people experience twice the health risk from air pollution than white people."

**Climate change perspective:** Lastly, there is an indirect consequence to our world at large. About a third of Maryland's total greenhouse gas emissions come from the transportation sector. A key component of climate action is mass transit expansion. According to "Transit Equity and Environmental Health in Baltimore," a 2021 report by researchers at Johns Hopkins and the Baltimore Transit Equity Coalition: "The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change emphasizes that greenhouse gasses must be reduced by 50-85% from current consumption to limit global warming to four degrees Fahrenheit. When compared to the average SUV or sedan, buses produce approximately 33% less pounds of carbon dioxide per passenger mile, while the metro, LightRail, and MARC trains can see as much as a 76% reduction in carbon dioxide per passenger mile. Communities with strong public transportation systems can reduce the nation's carbon emissions by 37 million metric tons yearly." Through legislation guaranteeing equitable transit service, MLU firmly believes many of these issues can be resolved.

For all of these reasons and many more, please support the Transportation Equity Act. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Carlos Alberto Orbe, Jr.

