

State of Maryland Commission on Civil Rights

Respect...Integrity...Effective Communication

“Our vision is to have a State that is free from any trace of unlawful discrimination.”



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Senate Bill 19– Equity in Transportation Sector– Guidelines and Analyses POSITION: Support

Dear Chairperson Griffith, Vice Chairperson Klausmeier, and Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

The Maryland Commission on Civil Rights (“MCCR”; “The Commission”) is the State agency responsible for the enforcement of laws prohibiting discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodations, state contracts and health services based upon race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, marital status, familial status, sexual orientation, gender identity, genetic information, physical and mental disability, and source of income.

Senate Bill 19 requires that equity be considered when State transportation plans, reports, and goals are developed. It includes altering the membership of the advisory committee, the Mass Transit Administration (MTA) to conduct certain analyses and consult with affected communities, and holding public hearings on any proposed service changes, in collaboration with the Department of Transportation. The Maryland Transit Administration is required to take action to avoid or minimize disparate impacts or disproportionate burdens on disadvantaged communities.

Transportation is directly related to accessing employment, education, adequate food, and healthcare. Nationally, the poorest families spend more than 40% of their take home pay on transportation. Additionally, black households are least likely to have access to a vehicle, making a robust public transit system a necessity. There are numerous studies that show that transportation decisions can have major negative effects in low-income communities. For example, a project in Nashville was supposed to create dedicated lanes for buses for approximately \$175 million, but it was canceled. It was shown that the bus project would have served mainly white and upper-class neighborhoods, ignoring neighboring low-income black communities.

Baltimore's own U.S. Route 40, or the "Highway to Nowhere" was a highway construction project that displaced 1,500 residents and destroyed approximately 971 houses and 62 businesses in 1969. The project was initially rejected when white residents resisted the construction in their own neighborhoods. Then the project was restarted in neighboring black communities, but the same pleas from black residents were ignored. The endeavor produced just 1.39 miles of highway before it was permanently canceled. The "Highway to Nowhere" stands as a reminder that transportation decisions are impactful and must be handled appropriately.

Additionally, citizens with disabilities and residents that do not speak English also suffer when decisions are made without adequate input and consideration of their needs. Adults with disabilities are twice as likely to struggle with inadequate transportation than adults without disabilities. In Baltimore, over 12% of the population has a disability, which requires that sidewalks and bus stops be accessible. Lastly, residents that do not speak English have difficulty accessing transportation and tend to live closer to busy highways and industrial facilities. This increases the pollution-imposed health risks prominent in these communities.

Cities across the country have implemented similar initiatives. For example, Seattle's equity cabinet was created to help guide strategic plans to provide equitable and sustainable transportation. The measures proposed in Senate Bill 19 would require that equity be considered to avoid furthering Maryland's long history of discriminatory decisions in transportation. MCCR finds that the standards in SB 19 are consistent with the spirit of Title 20, and thus are appropriate tools for achieving equity in transportation.

For these reasons, the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights urges a favorable vote on SB 19. Thank you for your time and consideration of the information contained in this letter. The Maryland Commission on Civil Rights looks forward to the continued opportunity to work with you to improve and promote civil rights in Maryland.

