

JOTF JOB OPPORTUNITIES TASK FORCE

Advocating better skills, jobs, and incomes

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 0019: Equity in Transportation Sector - Guidelines and Analyses

TO: Chair Melony Griffith and Members of the Senate Finance Committee

FROM: Ioana Stoica, Policy Advocate

DATE: Tuesday, January 31, 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 Senate Bill 0019 as a means of expanding transit access to low-income communities, particularly to residents of color.**

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, 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 - an initiative that the Equity in Transportation Act would have prevented, had it been in place at the time. Development of the Red Line would have significantly expanded access to employment opportunities and would have spurred economic development in Baltimore City, but instead, residents were left behind by the administration and by the city's eroding bus system - which has also not been prioritized by the Department of Transportation under the prior administration.

When advocates challenged Governor Hogan's red line decision under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, the Trump administration refused to hear the case. So, last year, the Maryland General Assembly took action and codified civil rights protections via the Transit Equity Act.

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The bill passed with no opposition and with bipartisan support, however, it was vetoed by Governor Hogan.

The Red Line is only one example in a long list of Maryland transit projects that have disregarded the needs of low-income and of black and brown communities. Others include proposed toll lanes, and the Maglev Project through Prince George's County, which was paused only after significant community opposition. Maryland residents should not have to continually fend off transportation projects that increase inequity. Whenever the state is planning any major service changes, the Maryland Department of Transportations have to conduct transit equity analyses, cost benefit analyses, and outreach to affected communities before public hearings. Instead of inequitable decisions being made and then communities having to challenge them in court or through other organized actions, Senate Bill 0019 would require the state to consider equity from the beginning.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 0019.

For more information, contact:

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