



WASHINGTON METROPOLITAN AREA TRANSIT AUTHORITY

Public Testimony in Support of SB 693

Transportation – Assaults on Public Transit Operators – Report

Before the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

March 1, 2023

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to testify today. For the record, my name is Charlie Scott and I am the Senior Government Relations Officer for the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA). I am here to urge your strong support for Senate Bill 693.

When a transit employee is assaulted, it not only jeopardizes the safety of a WMATA employee, but fellow riders and the public at large. These situations can occur on both our Metrorail and our Metrobus systems and due to the closer interactions between customers and bus operators, Metro encounters most of these types of issues on its bus system. The offenses our operators encounter vary and include: spitting on operators; striking operators with closed fists, sticks, bricks and poles; assaults with deadly weapons (for example, guns and knives); fondling and attempting to undress female operators.

These altercations not only put our operators in harm's way, they also put passengers on the bus and pedestrians and motorists on the public streets in jeopardy. We shudder to think of the injuries that may result from an operator losing control of a vehicle after being hit by a brick – or some other object – while operating his or her vehicle.

Metro has taken many actions to deter such assaults – all Metrobuses are equipped with security cameras and plexiglass shields to protect the operator. Additionally, we deploy undercover Metro Transit Police officers dedicated to riding buses and have additional scout cars patrolling troubled bus routes.

These actions have been helpful, but alone are not enough. In the past few years, we have experienced a significant increase in assaults on Metro employees. Specifically in Maryland, the number of assaults on station managers, train operators and bus operators has increased from a total of 16 in 2020 to 37 in 2021 and 33 in 2022. Adding other employees to the tallies of assaults, in Maryland alone our employees are assaulted on almost a weekly basis.

Employee Assaults (M - 2021)	
Employee Type	#
Bus Operator	26
Contract Employee	3
Other Employee	8
Bus Supervisor	2
Car Maint. Employee	1
Plant Maintenance	1
Radio Technician	1
Rail Training Instructor	1
Station Manager*	1
Construction Supervisor	1
Train Operator	6
Station Manager	5
Total:	48

Employee Assaults (MD - 2022)	
Employee Type	#
Bus Operator	27
Contract Employee	4
Other Employee	12
Fare Tech	1
Bus Operator*	2
Custodian	3
Electrical Mechanic	1
Elevator/Escalator Tech	1
Mechanic	1
Power Tech	1
Special Police Officer	1
Station Manager*	1
Station Manager	6
Total:	49

**Bus Operator and Station Manager within the "Other Category" were not performing their specific duties while assaulted and therefore categorized as "Other employee".*

Coupled with the actions we are taking, I believe this legislation is a step in the right direction towards bringing greater public awareness to the environment our employees face as they serve our riding public. We hope that shedding more light on these assaults will lead to greater penalties for offenders.

I thank Senator Waldstreicher and members of this Committee for providing leadership on this important issue and thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of SB 693.