

SB 891 HENT Daria Pugh - Disability Rights Marylan

Uploaded by: Daria Pugh

Position: FAV



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SB 891: MobilityLink Paratransit Service Improvements Study

House Environment and Transportation Committee

April 2, 2024

Position: Support

Disability Rights Maryland submits this testimony in support of SB 891: MobilityLink Paratransit Service Improvements Study. Disability Rights Maryland is the federally designated Protection and Advocacy agency in Maryland, mandated to defend and advance the civil rights of people with disabilities. An enumerated purpose of DRM's legal work is to continue to secure improvements in the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA)'s paratransit and work with community members to improve transportation access for individuals with disabilities.

DRM supports the MobilityLink Paratransit Service Improvements Study because it mandates an independent study of MTA's MobilityLink service delivery and quality, and will provide valuable recommendations to policymakers on how to improve MobilityLink. Paratransit plays a vital role for people with disabilities in accessing meaningful participation in economic, social, and recreational activities.

DRM requests that the House maintain the Senate version of this bill. The amendment requiring the Maryland Department of Transportation to incorporate the study's findings and recommendations into the 2050 Maryland Transportation is not appropriate at this time. This amendment is premature, and incorporation into the 2050 plan should be considered once the study has concluded and findings are presented. Policymakers and agency officials should have time to review the findings before they are incorporated into the Maryland Transportation Plan.

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act, MobilityLink service must be comparable to the level of service and response time as MTA's fixed route lines.¹ Over the years, however, MobilityLink riders have seen inconsistent levels of service, often falling far below comparable service levels. MobilityLink rides have to arrive within a half-hour window of the appointment time to be considered "on-time." In the past seven years, MobilityLink's on-time performance has dropped below its 93.5% goal far too frequently. On-time performance fell to the lowest point at 59.2% in 2021, with late pick-ups on over 38,600 occasions.² Performance gradually increased, but suddenly dropped again in March 2022 to 73.3%.³

Poor service, such as late pick-ups and drop-offs, long trip times, missed rides, and lengthy wait times for customer service calls, have negative implications for riders. These poor service issues cause riders to be late for work, miss medical appointments, and miss entire events. Riders have been stranded all night when their MobilityLink ride has failed to show. This

¹ 42 U.S.C.A. § 12143.

² MTA MobilityLink On-Time Performance, available at <https://www.mta.maryland.gov/performance-improvement>.

³ *Id.*

is unacceptable; people with disabilities who rely on MobilityLink deserve dependability. Riders must be able to rely on getting to their appointments without concern that their ride might be late or not show up.

MobilityLink currently uses third-party contractors to provide more than 99% of its rides. The third-party contractors have had high levels of employee turnover, reaching rates of over 100% a year. There is also a substantial level of absenteeism, leaving the remaining operators to work longer shifts to cover the demand. The third-party contractors start MobilityLink operators' pay at a level that is \$5 per hour lower than their peers who work for MTA's fixed-route service. Fixed-route operators' pay increases to over \$12 per hour, the top rate for the contracted paratransit operators. Low wages, unaffordable health care plans, and limited retirement benefits deter operators who are passionate about providing safe rides to passengers with disabilities from staying in their jobs long term.

SB 891 proposes an independent study by the Maryland Transportation Institute (MTI) at the University of Maryland to identify methods to improve the paratransit service. It is critical that this study is performed by an independent third party. The legislature has required the Maryland Department of Transportation's MTA to study and report on its paratransit service in the past, yet the areas of concern identified by the legislature in these requests remain today. MTI will provide an objective report to policymakers on MobilityLink service, quality, and workforce. The report will serve as an excellent starting point for reforming MobilityLink.

The MobilityLink Paratransit Service Improvements Study will compare MobilityLink with other paratransit entities around the country to identify the best method for service delivery. It will conduct a cost-benefit analysis of paratransit service quality, reliability, and financial costs. The study will analyze and compare paratransit services nationwide, including turnover and absenteeism rates, average length of employment, preventable accidents, average wages and benefits, and career training opportunities, among other workforce metrics.

MobilityLink riders will also be consulted to provide valuable input about their experiences using the service. MTI will share its findings and recommendations with state and local officials. DRM is confident that this study will provide key information our state can use to ensure that MobilityLink service works optimally for its riders.

For these reasons, we support SB 891 and request a favorable report. For more information or questions, contact: Daria Pugh, Staff Attorney, Disability Rights Maryland, DariaP@DisabilityRightsMD.org or (443) 692-2487.

Respectfully submitted,

Daria Pugh
Disability Rights Maryland

Testimony in support of crossover bill SB0891.pdf

Uploaded by: Richard KAP Kaplowitz

Position: FAV

CROSSOVER BILL SB0891_RichardKaplowitz_FAV
4/2/2022

Richard Keith Kaplowitz
Frederick, MD 21703-7134

TESTIMONY ON CROSSOVER BILL SB#0891 - POSITION: FAVORABLE

Transportation - MobilityLink Paratransit Service Improvements – Study

TO: Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

FROM: Richard Keith Kaplowitz

My name is Richard Kaplowitz. I am a resident of District 3. I am submitting this testimony in support of CROSSOVER BILL SB#0891, Transportation - MobilityLink Paratransit Service Improvements – Study

This bill will create a study group of experts to identify methods to improve the Maryland Transit Administration's ADA MobilityLink paratransit service. My son, a long-term care patient, relies on this service to get to and from doctor appointments and to shop for himself. The service is frequently not available at the times or dates he needs it; he has been late being picked up for transit to and from his doctor's appointments.

Maryland has a world class Maryland Transportation Institute at the University of Maryland that is equipped to undertake this study and report their findings and recommendations to the Governor and General Assembly and localities governing structures by July 1, 2025. The bill establishes the amount of and how this study should be funded.

Maryland legislators need good data to make good decisions on this or any other issue. This bill will lead to the acquisition of that data to make that possible. We need to take care of those who are most affected by this paratransit service to make it work for them and for Maryland. Funding this study is a first step to accomplishing that goal.

I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on CROSSOVER BILL SB0891.

2024 TCC SB 891 House Side.pdf

Uploaded by: Robyn Elliott

Position: FAV



THE COORDINATING CENTER
INSPIRED SOLUTIONS

Committee: House Environment and Transportation Committee

Bill Number: Senate Bill 891 - Transportation – MobilityLink Paratransit Service Improvement Study

Hearing Date: April 2, 2024

Position: Support

The Coordinating Center supports *Senate Bill 891 – Transportation – MobilityLink Paratransit Service Improvement Study*. This bill would commission a study on needed improvements in the MobilityLink Paratransit Service Program.

Our organization provides care coordination to clients enrolled in Community First Choice and many of Maryland Medicaid’s home and community-based service waivers. Many of our clients have mobility issues and rely on transportation program to travel for medical appointments, work, and family obligations. However, the paratransit services are not consistently available, making it challenging for our clients to get their basic needs met.

We ask for a favorable report. If we can provide any additional information that is helpful, please contact Robyn Elliott at relliott@policypartners.net.

SB0891 - MTA - Mobility Study_LOI_FINAL_CO.pdf

Uploaded by: Pilar Helm

Position: INFO

April 2, 2024

The Honorable Marc Korman
Chair, House Environment and Transportation Committee
251 House Office Building
Annapolis MD 21401

RE: Letter of Information – Senate Bill 891 – Transportation – MobilityLink Paratransit Service Improvements – Study

Dear Chair Korman and Committee Members:

The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) offers the following information on Senate Bill 891 for the Committee’s consideration.

Senate Bill 891 would require the Maryland Transportation Institute at the University of Maryland to conduct a study on the Maryland Transit Administration’s (MTA) Mobility paratransit service, with a report due by July 1, 2025, and authorizes the Governor to include at least \$150,000 in Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 for the Study.

The MTA operates Mobility paratransit, which is a specialized transit service available to those who, because of a functional or cognitive disability, are unable to get to a bus stop, wait unassisted at a stop or station or board or ride a bus or train by themselves. Mobility is a shared ride door-to-door service, which is federally required to operate within three-quarters of a mile radius of MTA’s fixed route service.

As amended, Senate Bill 891 requires the study include recommendations for service improvements for individuals outside of a three-quarters mile radius of a fixed transportation route and recommendations to address interjurisdictional restrictions to paratransit services. The Mobility service area is bound to serve origins and destinations within three-quarters of a mile radius of MTA’s fixed route service, due to federal requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Additionally, Mobility service is not impacted by interjurisdictional restrictions; the service area is bound by the ADA to be within three-quarters of a mile of fixed route service, to complement that fixed route service. Any recommendations of the study to expand the service area outside of what is federally required service area would have a significant and negative impact on the Transportation Trust Fund.

The MTA recognizes the critical service that Mobility provides to riders. To understand existing and future needs, the MTA will be undertaking an internal study of Mobility, including but not limited to six key tasks: the collection and review of existing information, interviews with Mobility riders and MTA staff, defining existing conditions, updating service strategies, ridership and fleet forecasting, and developing a fleet and operations management plan.

The Honorable Marc Korman
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As a result, MTA will be producing a 10-year projection on ridership and staffing levels needed to operate Mobility services, as well as determining information on system improvements and any necessary vehicle replacements. It is estimated that MTA's existing study will cost \$175,000 and MTA would like to note that those funds have already been identified; no additional dollars from the Transportation Trust Fund or the General Fund are needed to complete the existing study. MTA would be happy to add the requirements of this bill to the existing study. MTA is currently expecting work to begin Spring 2024, with work completed in Fall 2024.

Additionally, MTA is currently engaged in discussions with the United States Department of Justice (DoJ) to resolve a service complaint and DoJ letter finding noncompliance. As a result of these discussions, the MTA would request being the responsible party for conducting a study on Mobility improvements. The agency is committed to continuous improvements for our paratransit riders and believes that MTA is the best party to complete the study.

The Maryland Department of Transportation respectfully requests that the Committee consider this information when deliberating Senate Bill 891.

Respectfully submitted,

Melissa Einhorn
Director of Governmental Affairs
Maryland Transit Administration
410-767-0820

Pilar Helm
Director of Government Affairs
Maryland Department of Transportation
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