



## **Senate Bill 331**

### *Task Force to Study Paratransit in Maryland*

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Finance Committee

Date: February 7, 2024

From: Dominic J. Butchko

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** SB 331. This bill establishes the Task Force to Study Paratransit in Maryland, to examine areas such as funding, spending gaps, and a possible role for public-private partnerships. Counties are increasingly compelled to direct local revenues to this informal and scattered system of services – the Task Force may help align common goals and promote stronger, more uniform services and provider duties.

Most individuals are familiar with the concept of when they call 9-1-1, an ambulance shows up to take them to a hospital or delivers treatment in the field. Paratransit represents complementary services. Instead of responding to an emergency, paratransit services help our most vulnerable residents get to their non-emergency medical appointments. The scope of these appointments can range dramatically and may be anything from dialysis or chemotherapy to a standard check-in with a primary care provider.

Funding for paratransit services has increasingly been a burden left to county transit agencies. A 2013 joint report from the Maryland Department of Transportation and others pointed to a critical need for paratransit funding going into the 2020s. The report projected that demand would increase at least 83% and investment would need to increase from \$19 million to roughly \$35 million. In the current post-COVID-19 environment, counties in all corners of the state are seeing a marked increase in the demand for paratransit services, while also struggling to recruit the necessary personnel.

Counties cannot support the state's demand for paratransit services alone, especially when enduring the fiscal pressures of the Blueprint, inflation, higher interest rates, and other negative economic headwinds. It is imperative that state and local stakeholders come together to explore alternative avenues that may support our paratransit service and our most vulnerable neighbors. As such, counties urge the Committee to give SB 331 a **FAVORABLE** report.