

**SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE****Senate Bill 70: Transportation - Change in Bus Service - Impacts Report****Date: January 31, 2024****Position: Support (with Sponsor Amendment)**

Thank you Madam Chair Beidle and Committee Members, and for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 70. I'd also like to thank Senator McCray for recognizing the importance of paratransit to thousands of Marylanders with disabilities by his sponsorship of this bill, and I appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of the bill with the sponsor amendment.

Disability Rights Maryland (DRM) is the protection and advocacy organization for the state of Maryland. DRM's mission is to advocate for the legal rights of people with disabilities throughout the state. One of the mandated purposes of DRM's legal work is to ensure that people with disabilities are included in their communities.

Community integration requires public transportation systems that are equally reliable, effective, and accessible to people with disabilities. Senate Bill 70 increases the transparency of agency decisions, facilitates engagement and oversight from the community, and allows Marylanders with disabilities who travel by bus or paratransit to make better informed decisions pertaining to travel and life plans.

All Marylanders should be able to rely on consistent travel plans to facilitate their various life activities. When transit agencies change these routes or reduce service, unexpectedly, the result can be extremely chaotic for riders, and cause serious disruptions to riders' day-to-day activities. Those with disabilities are no exception, as many people with disabilities rely on bus and paratransit to travel to critical events like work, school, and medical appointments. Of course, it's important that our transit agencies have the ability to adapt to demand to allow systems to function optimally for all, but there must be a clear process and means of notice and engagement for those impacted. Senate Bill 70 provides such a process.

The understanding that alterations to bus routes directly impact paratransit riders is paramount, and Senate Bill 70 addresses this linkage by ensuring that the measured impact on bus routes will be applied to paratransit, and that the community will be informed. Senate Bill 70 requires the MTA to provide comprehensive information about those who will be impacted by bus and paratransit service reductions and route changes. This bill ensures that any proposed alterations to bus routes, which inherently affect paratransit services, are communicated in advance.

In conclusion, Senate Bill 70 is not just about transparency in transit changes; it is a crucial step toward ensuring accessibility and inclusivity for all individuals, including those with disabilities who rely on paratransit services.

**For these reasons, DRM strongly supports Senate Bill 70 with the sponsor's amendment, and urges a favorable report.**

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gabriel H. Rubinstein". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

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