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**SB 331 - Task Force to Study Paratransit in Maryland
Senate Finance Committee
February 5, 2024**

SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENT

**Donna S. Edwards
President
Maryland State and DC AFL-CIO**

Madame Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 331 if amended to include crucial worker and rider input. My name is Donna S. Edwards, and I am the President of the Maryland State and DC AFL-CIO. On behalf of the 300,000 union members in the state of Maryland, I offer the following comments.

SB 331 creates a Task Force to Study Paratransit in Maryland with representation appointed from the General Assembly, state departments, and local transit agencies. SB 331 excludes important representation necessary for any full discussion on the future of paratransit in the state of Maryland. There are thousands of dedicated paratransit workers currently working for private contractors. They experience firsthand the failures of the system to respond adequately to the paratransit riders. Workers deserve a seat at the table when there are study groups that impact the future services they provide.

To fix this issue, we propose the following amendment:

Insert the following text after Section (B)(7), moving all subsequent text down:

“(8) three members representing paratransit workers, appointed by the Maryland State & DC AFL-CIO.

(9) one current paratransit rider from each of Maryland’s five regions: Western, Capital, Central, Southern, and Eastern Shore.”

Additionally, strike (f) (3) and insert the following in its place, moving all subsequent text down:

“(3) service quality issues addressed in the Federal Transportation Administration’s Americans with Disabilities Act guidance including: reservation system and response time, untimely pickups, trip denials, excessive trip length, poor telephone performance, practices that discourage use of service, and any additional matters the task force identifies as important to paratransit service quality; and

(4) workforce issues that may impact paratransit service including: turnover rate, average length of employment, accident and preventable rates, workplace injury rates, workers' compensation claims rates, career training opportunities, career advancement opportunities, average wages and benefits, morale and satisfaction, and any other additional matters the task force identifies that impact the paratransit workforce."

The Task Force's proposed scope is excessively focused towards cost savings through public private partnerships. We strongly feel quality of services, ridership levels, trip lengths, and the presence of a dedicated well paid workforce that encourages higher retention rates must be part of the Task Force's work and recommendations.

For these reasons, we urge the committee to only support SB 331 if it has been amended to address these concerns.