



FREDERICK COUNTY GOVERNMENT
OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Jessica Fitzwater
County Executive

SB 331 –Task Force to Study Paratransit in Maryland

DATE: February 7, 2024
COMMITTEE: Senate Finance Committee
POSITION: Favorable
FROM: The Office of Frederick County Executive Jessica Fitzwater

As the County Executive of Frederick County, I urge the committee to give **SB 331 –Task Force to Study Paratransit in Maryland** a favorable report.

Paratransit is a door-to-door demand-response service for older adults and disabled residents to assist with transportation for medical appointments. Currently, in Maryland, the State offers a small amount of funding via the Specialized Statewide Transportation Assistance Program (SSTAP). This funding has been flat for 16 years, outside of a recent adjustment for inflation, and Counties have contributed a growing share of the costs of this program. With the aging of our population, local governments cannot keep pace with the funding needs of this service.

As demand for paratransit services increases, State and local governments will need to address the growing funding deficit for this crucial service. The Maryland General Assembly should establish a Paratransit Funding Task Force to study the needs of this service and propose recommendations to adequately and sustainably fund it.

At present, Frederick County is providing a significant overmatch to maintain the program; approximately \$1,000,000 annually. While our Frederick County Transit team has made many efforts to help address the growing need, including expanding the Taxi Access Program and providing transit training to increase the use of the fixed route system, these strategies cannot substantially offset the increased demand. We estimate that there will be approximately 10,000 trip denials in FY24 due to insufficient funding.

While the Federal government supports public transportation through DOT/FTA urban and rural transportation grants, 5307 Section 9 (urban) and 5311 Section 18 (rural) grant programs, there is no Federal support for paratransit services for older adults and people with disabilities who are unable to use public transit.

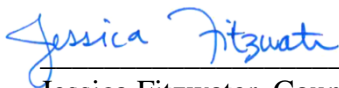
Senator Karen Lewis Young has successfully passed legislation to adjust SSTAP funding to account for inflation, however, the changing demographics and increased demand for the service have not been accounted for in State funding decisions. The State, in coordination with local partners, must identify funding solutions to sustain this program.

The proposed Task Force would study the growing demand for paratransit, potential funding mechanisms for the program, and the industries that benefit from the availability of this service. I am particularly supportive of the broad stakeholder engagement outlined in the Task Force's membership. Collaboration and creative problem-solving will be key to addressing this issue.

The final report from the Task Force should include legislative recommendations to help alleviate the financial burden on local governments and ensure the decrease and eventual elimination of trip denials as a result of insufficient funding.

I look forward to working in partnership with the State on this matter to ensure our older adults and disabled constituents can access reliable transportation for their medical appointments.

I appreciate Senator Lewis Young’s steadfast support of our transit programs and her advocacy on this issue. Thank you for your consideration of SB 331 and I urge a favorable report.



Jessica Fitzwater, County Executive
Frederick County, MD