

Bill: House Bill 1344: Maryland Transit Administration – Locally Operated Transit Systems – Study
Position: SUPPORT

Dear Chair Korman, Vice-Chair Guyton, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Jessica Richards and I work as a regional transit coordinator in Southern Maryland. **I am writing in support of House Bill 1344.** In my position, I work with all the Locally Operated Transportation providers in the region, as well as many nonprofit agencies that provide transportation as part of their mission. Our agency also administers the Wheels to Wellness program in partnership with The Arc of Southern Maryland and The Center for Life Enrichment, providing door-to-door non-emergency medical transportation service to residents who are not well served by traditional public transport.

Doing this work, I see firsthand the impact of budget constraints, and I personally support a study that would provide additional information. While the Wheels to Wellness program is not among those directly impacted by traditional transportation budget cuts, the Wheels to Wellness program has been impacted by stagnant funding in a few ways. First, we have seen an increase in ride requests due to funding challenges from the Locally Operated Transit Agencies, who are unable to provide additional State Supplemental Transportation Assistance due to budget restrictions and capacity restrictions. We have also seen reduced or stagnant funding ourselves from our grantors, who have had funding reductions at the state level. We have further found it difficult to secure other state transportation funding for this program, despite the clear need for this type of door-to-door service for some of our most vulnerable residents.

I believe that House Bill 1344 will provide essential data to help show the true statewide issues facing transit, and am pleased this committee is taking a step to resolve this through collecting this critical information. Understanding the scope of the problem is a necessary step in fixing it. As HB 1344 helps to identify critical funding shortfalls, it will assist in future efforts to reform local transit funding, assure adequate state resources, and enable key transportation programs such as Wheels to Wellness to continue to serve our residents in need.

For these reasons, among many others, I respectfully urge a favorable report on HB 1344.

Sincerely,

Jessica Richards