

Testimony on SB 199
Maryland Transit Safety & Investment Act
Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
January 20, 2021

Favorable

Disability Rights Maryland (DRM) is the state's protection and advocacy system, mandated to advance the rights of people with disabilities. Transportation plays a key role in the struggle for civil rights and equal opportunity in the disability community. According to a report from the Center for Disease Control, adults with disabilities are twice as likely as those without disabilities to have inadequate transportation.

Public transit is the sole option for many people with disabilities. Affordable and reliable transportation allows people with disabilities access to education, employment, health care, housing, and community life. Individuals who cannot access other public transit options due to their disabilities rely on paratransit service.

MTA's 2019 Capital Needs Inventory (CNI) uses 2017 data to identify that paratransit provided **2 million rides**. However, at the end of 2019, MTA paratransit service provided approximately **3 million rides**. It is the fastest growing public transit sector. This calculus was not part of the CNI. In addition, the legislative analyst found that MTA has historically **underfunded paratransit services and also stated that the MTA fiscal 2019 budget shows a pattern of flat funding that is unusual compared with past years and more pronounced than in any of the other transit units**.

The consequences of people being ill served are serious: dialysis patients not getting life needed treatments, people waiting for 3-6 hours for rides, day programs for people with disabilities not able to ensure people get home timely for medications and support staff services, jobs at risk or not obtainable, and school classes missed. You have heard it before. These are not isolated instances, they are the result of a system which can and must do better.

For those persons with disabilities who can use the fixed bus system, the lack of needed service, bus breakdowns and lengthy trips are problems that also impact the ability to be fully integrated in our communities. The equity issues and the intersectionality of race and disability are self-evident. Equal opportunity for persons of color and persons with disabilities demand investment - continued deterioration perpetuates inequity and segregation. Please consider the implications to our communities of permitting public transit to deteriorate.

I have attached testimony of paratransit riders who could not access the Mgaleg.maryland.gov website to submit their testimony. These testimonials reflect the experiences of Disability Rights Maryland in representing thousands of paratransit riders over the past decade.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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