



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 091
Criminal Law- Assault of a Public Transportation Operator- Penalties
January 18, 2021

To: Hon. William Smith, Chair, and members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

From: Clint Sobratti, Vice President, UFCW Local 1994 MCGEO

Good afternoon Chairman Smith and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee,

My name is Clint Sobratti, I am a vice president of UFCW Local 1994 MCGEO and I am testifying in support of SB 91. Ride On Bus Operators are frequently victims of assault and must be offered the same protections as firefighters, paramedics probation and parole agents.

I've worked as a Bus Operator and a Transit Coordinator with Montgomery County Transit Department (Ride-on) for the past ten years and I also serve as a shop stewards for my union. Over the years, I have heard and witnessed numerous attacks on drivers that have endangered, not only the driver but passengers and other vehicles as well.

Right before COVID-19 outbreak, a senior driver was brutally assaulted, sustaining serious injuries to his face, a swollen jaw, and a black and blue eye. The driver was relieved from his duties to recover and care from his injuries. Upon returning to work and back on his regular schedule, the driver now must transport the man that violently attacked him. His assailant never faced serious repercussions and this operator is petrified for his safety and life.

In another recent example, without fear of any real repercussions, a male passenger continuously harassed a female bus operator every day on her set schedule routes. This passenger threatened the driver daily, throwing objects at the bus operator and causing her to be distracted with a bus full of passengers. This passenger went as far as kicking and breaking the glass door to the entrance of the bus. The female driver was in fear of her life, she reported the incident and started to take time off from work to avoid any more interaction with that passenger. Being a single mother and a target of violence, this bus operator was contemplating a career change. I spoke with management regarding this issue and we had devised a plan for me to follow her the next day at work and figure out who and why this was happening. The following day the driver was too afraid to come to work and I was unable to resolve the problem. Luckily, the driver was able to switch routes, but the passenger remains a threat. These are only two of many horrific stories

that I could share with you. Just this summer, a bus driver was killed by passengers in Baltimore and every day I am afraid that this may happen to another driver.

Transit Operators are serving on the front lines in a pandemic that has cost hundreds of thousands of lives and we are the lifeline that keeps people employed, business open and the economy moving forward. It is an incredibly high stress- and high stakes occupation that carries many obstacles, but ASSAULT should not be one of them. Attacks on transit operators are increasing and these assaults threaten not only the driver, but everyone on the bus and every other vehicle on the road. Please help to keep us and the passengers who depend on us safe.

On behalf of the over 8,000 members of UFCW Local 1994 MCGEO, I ask for a **favorable** report on this legislation.