



Bill: Senate Bill 838: Transportation - Elderly and Handicapped Transportation Service - County Funding

Position: SUPPORT

Dear Chairman Guzzone, Vice-Chair Rosapepe, and Members of the Committee:

The Transportation Association of Maryland is a 501(c)(3) organization representing 104+ member organizations consisting of locally operated transit agencies (LOTS), non-profit transit providers, transportation vendor and transportation supporters with 20,000+ individual members. TAM is the legislative voice and vigilant eyes and ears of the transportation industry in Maryland. TAM's mission is to strengthen community transportation in Maryland through advocacy and professional development.

The Statewide Specialized Transportation Assistance Program (SSTAP) funding has been flat for many years (Maryland Transit Administration 2021), despite increases in the population it was intended to serve (seniors and disabled persons). This funding is provided to every county and several cities in Maryland, and is used to provide demand-response service to elderly and disabled persons. The failure of this program to keep pace with cost increases has been, in effect, a funding cut. TAM has tried multiple methods over previous years to address the issue of non-emergency medical transportation costs to our members and the difficulties this creates for the customers they serve, including charging dialysis centers on a per-trip basis.

This bill would ensure that the critical Statewide Specialized Transportation Assistance Program (SSTAP) receives regular and sustained funding increases to offset years of flat funding. This legislation would require the Secretary of the Department of Transportation, beginning in fiscal year 2025, to appropriate an amount at least equal to the previous year's funding, adjusted for inflation.

SSTAP is funding provided directly to local transit agencies in Maryland to transport elderly and handicapped persons. Despite the increasing need for this service, funding for SSTAP has been flat for over 20 years. During this time, public transportation providers have experienced growing costs in every area of service, including fuel, vehicles, and driver salary. From 2009 to 2018, operating expenses increased by 39.8% (Federal Transit Administration 2019). The population served by this program is expected to grow six times faster than Maryland's general population. (Maryland Department of Transportation 2018)

Transportation's availability to elderly and handicapped persons is a critical element in allowing them to live independent lives of dignity within their community. Trips provided through SSTAP take passengers to jobs, dialysis appointments, doctor's visits, grocery stores, and a host of other activities essential to daily life. This transportation is also a cost-savings measure, as the average additional cost to Medicare/Medicaid is \$1,784 more per year per nursing home resident over those who age in place. (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development 2013)

To ensure that this service is not reduced by rising costs and flat funding, it is necessary for locally operated transit systems to have funding sources that recognize cost inflation.

Our hope is that this legislation will create a baseline for this funding, protect it from future budget cuts, and begin to correct the neglect shown this program for many years. We view this as a first step

of many that will be required to adequately fund mobility services for both this population and all those who rely on public transit.

Please feel free to contact our office if you have any other questions or want to discuss more fully.

Sincerely,

John Duklewski
Executive Director, Transportation Association of Maryland

References

- Federal Transit Administration. 2019. *2018 National Transit Summaries and Trends*. U.S. Department of Transportation.
- Maryland Department of Transportation. 2018. *Maryland Transportation Plan Technical Memorandum: Conditions, Trends, and Challenges*. 2040 Maryland Transportation Plan.
- Maryland Transit Administration. 2021. *Locally Operated Transit Systems (LOTS) Funding Related to Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (NEMT)*. 2021 JCR, pg. 79.
- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. 2013. *Evidence Matters*. 10. Accessed 3 3, 2022. <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/periodicals/em/fall13/highlight2.html>.