

Transportation Equity Act of 2022

Public Health Need | Submitted by Megan Weil Latshaw, PhD MHS
January 26, 2022

Good afternoon Mr. Chair and Committee members, I'm here to speak in support of SB0023.

I'm Dr. Megan Latshaw, I live in Baltimore City in District 43 (with Senator Washington). I am on faculty at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in the Department of Environmental Health & Engineering. The opinions expressed herein are my own and do not necessarily reflect the views of Johns Hopkins University.

Public transit provides relatively low-cost access to jobs, education, food, and healthcare. Access to all of these contributes to the economy of Maryland, and through this access Marylanders tend to be healthier and more productive both personally and professionally, including requiring less time off from work.

Public transit also reduces pollution and greenhouse gas emissions by taking cars off the roads. It is linked with increased physical activity. Reducing pollution and increasing physical activity directly impacts cardiovascular and respiratory health. Cardiovascular health should be a priority for our state, since heart disease continues to be the leading cause of death, accounting for almost a 25% of all deaths. Maryland ranks 20th in the nation for deaths from cardiovascular disease.

Despite these health benefits, public transit in Baltimore (and likely other parts of the state) often fails to get people to their destinations in a reasonable amount of time. This is especially concerning since low-income people of color represent the majority of transit-users in Baltimore, many of whom during the COVID-19 pandemic were classified as "essential workers". Rural areas may have similar issues, but this hasn't been studied yet in Maryland.

Given past racist policies in the state that included segregation and redlining, we need to be sure that we're not continuing to disproportionately impact poor or black and brown communities. All transit policies should be assessed prior to adoption to understand how they will impact those communities most in need of state assistance. This must be done with transparency and clear accountability to community voices.

This bill presents an opportunity to require such an analysis, ultimately driving improved transit access, equity, environmental quality, and health in the areas of the state that need it the most.