



Bill: Senate Bill 208: Criminal Law - Assault of a Public Transportation Service Provider - Penalties

Position: SUPPORT

Dear Chairman Smith, Vice-Chair Waldstreicher, 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.

This bill would grant transit operators the same legal protections against assault as police officers, firefighters, and emergency medical responders, making second-degree assault against them a felony punishable by up to 10 years imprisonment and/or a fine of up to \$2,500.

According to a TAM member survey conducted in 2020, over half of Maryland transit organizations have experienced multiple driver assaults in the previous year and over three out of four describe their drivers as regularly experiencing verbal threats and intimidation.

Our members use every available resource to provide safe and reliable service and our association has made great efforts to train our members' drivers to avoid conflict. However, occurrences of assault against drivers have been both increasing and escalating in nature. According to the Federal Transit Administration's National Transit Database, assaults on transit operators have increased fourfold since 2009. An average of 174 operator assaults that the Federal Transit Administration considers "major incidents" occurred each year during that period, according to the government database. In Maryland, we have seen three shooting deaths of bus drivers in the City of Baltimore in less than a year.

As we have seen throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, drivers are front-line operators who provide essential community mobility. Many drivers are senior citizens, retired from the protected class of public servants, operate at unusual hours in early morning and at night, handle money, and are strapped in and alone in their driver seat. They are uniquely vulnerable to assault.

Assaults on drivers not only endanger the driver but also put the lives of other passengers and pedestrians at risk as drivers are forced to confront attacks while trying to safely operate their vehicles. Enhancing the penalties for violence against transit operators will be an effective deterrent and numerous localities and states have already enacted stiffer penalties for such incidents.

For these reasons, the Transportation Association of Maryland respectfully requests a favorable vote.

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact John Duklewski at 410-553-4245 or jduklewski@taminc.org.

Sincerely,

John Duklewski
Executive Director, Transportation Association of Maryland