



Amalgamated Transit Union

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Statement of Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) SB 891 – MobilityLink Paratransit Service Improvements Study March 13, 2024

The Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) is the largest labor organization representing transit workers in the United States and Canada. The ATU is comprised of nearly 200,000 members in 267 local unions spread across 46 states and nine provinces. ATU Locals 689, 1300, 1764 and 1777 collectively represent nearly 2,000 paratransit workers in Maryland who work as both in-house and contracted workers for MTA MobilityLink, as well as at WMATA's MetroAccess system and the Anne Arundel County Office of Transportation. Our members work as paratransit operators, mechanics, dispatchers, safety instructors, road supervisors, trainers, and clerks.

The ATU supports SB 891 which would direct the University of Maryland's Maryland Transportation Institute to conduct a study to improve MTA's MobilityLink. This study would not only provide independent data on the status of paratransit service in the Baltimore Area but would also compare models of paratransit service provision at other transit agencies. In addition, the study will make recommendations for policymakers and the Administration to ensure that riders are able to fully depend on MobilityLink to get to work, school, medical appointments and back home. The ATU supports UMD's Transportation Institute to study this issue as they are an impartial body.

ATU members who provide vital paratransit service do this work because they are committed to serving passengers who rely on it. Unfortunately, too often subpar wages and benefits lead to high staff turnover and absenteeism, erodes the service quality. The workers who do stay must work overtime and cover for their colleagues while other staff are hired and trained, which leads to burnout and prevents ATU members who want to serve their community from staying in their jobs long-term.

We have seen that these issues often arise when paratransit service is contracted out to private companies who are encouraged to win state contracts through low bids that do not provide family-sustaining jobs. The starting rate for an in-house MTA paratransit operator is higher than the current top rate for a contracted paratransit operator. In-house operators' wages increase with experience on the job by more than twice as much as contracted paratransit operators.

These challenging working conditions and low salaries contribute to the fact that it is uncommon for contracted MTA paratransit workers to make it to their one-year anniversary. This constant churn of hiring and training has a strong negative impact on paratransit service. To this end, the study will analyze workforce and service performance metrics at paratransit services across the country and compare both in-house and contracted models.

We must ensure that we are doing everything we can to provide not only the minimum service required under the Americans with Disabilities Act (which mandates that MobilityLink service be comparable to MTA's fixed route service), but paratransit service that truly supports riders.

In closing, the Amalgamated Transit Union supports SB 891. We appreciate the Committee's interest in this issue and commitment to improving paratransit service for workers and riders.

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