

SB891.2024.pdf

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Position: FAV

SENATE BILL 891

Senate Finance Committee

March 13, 2024 at 1:00 pm

SUPPORT

By Claudia Barber, Attorney at Law

I strongly support Senate Bill 891. This bill, which would require the state to conduct a study to identify methods to improve the Maryland Transit Administration's paratransit service is critically important.

I currently serve as a Commissioner on the Anne Arundel County Transportation Commission. Our Commission has formed a task force to address the transportation needs of the underserved population. I chair this task force, and at least one community partner has enlightened us about the problems the disability community faces when trying to rely on public transportation to get to work on time. I am not testifying on behalf of the Commission, but as a private citizen, I support this study and this legislation to identify needs and come up with more identifiable ways to better serve the disabled population.

Thank you for your time.

SB 891 Daria Pugh - Disability Rights Maryland_fav

Uploaded by: Daria Pugh

Position: FAV



Empowerment. Integration. Equality.

1500 Union Ave., Suite 2000, Baltimore, MD 21211

Phone: 410-727-6352 | Fax: 410-727-6389

www.DisabilityRightsMD.org

SB 891: MobilityLink Paratransit Service Improvements Study

Senate Finance Committee

March 13, 2024

Position: Support

Disability Rights Maryland and allied partners submit this testimony in support of SB 891: MobilityLink Paratransit Service Improvements Study. This testimony has been signed on to by 20 other advocacy organizations.

Disability Rights Maryland is the federally designated Protection and Advocacy agency in Maryland, mandated to defend and advance the civil rights of people with disabilities. An enumerated purpose of DRM's legal work is to continue to secure improvements in the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA)'s paratransit and work with community members to improve transportation access for individuals with disabilities.

DRM supports the MobilityLink Paratransit Service Improvements Study because it mandates an independent study of MTA's MobilityLink service delivery and quality, and will provide valuable recommendations to policymakers on how to improve MobilityLink. Paratransit plays a vital role for people with disabilities in accessing meaningful participation in economic, social, and recreational activities.

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act, MobilityLink service must be comparable to the level of service and response time as MTA's fixed route lines.¹ Over the years, however, MobilityLink riders have seen inconsistent levels of service, often falling far below comparable service levels. MobilityLink rides have to arrive within a half-hour window of the appointment time to be considered "on-time." In the past seven years, MobilityLink's on-time performance has dropped below its 93.5% goal far too frequently. On-time performance fell to the lowest point at 59.2% in 2021, with late pick-ups on over 38,600 occasions.² Performance gradually increased, but suddenly dropped again in March 2022 to 73.3%.³

Poor service, such as late pick-ups and drop-offs, long trip times, missed rides, and lengthy wait times for customer service calls, have negative implications for riders. These poor service issues cause riders to be late for work, miss medical appointments, and miss entire events. Riders have been stranded all night when their MobilityLink ride has failed to show. This is unacceptable; people with disabilities who rely on MobilityLink deserve dependability. Riders

¹ 42 U.S.C.A. § 12143.

² MTA MobilityLink On-Time Performance, available at <https://www.mta.maryland.gov/performance-improvement>.

³ *Id.*

must be able to rely on getting to their appointments without concern that their ride might be late or not show up.

MobilityLink currently uses third-party contractors to provide more than 99% of its rides. The third-party contractors have had high levels of employee turnover, reaching rates of over 100% a year. There is also a substantial level of absenteeism, leaving the remaining operators to work longer shifts to cover the demand. The third-party contractors start MobilityLink operators' pay at a level that is \$5 per hour lower than their peers who work for MTA's fixed-route service. Fixed-route operators' pay increases to over \$12 per hour, the top rate for the contracted paratransit operators. Low wages, unaffordable health care plans, and limited retirement benefits deter operators who are passionate about providing safe rides to passengers with disabilities from staying in their jobs long term.

SB 891 proposes an independent study by the Maryland Transportation Institute (MTI) at the University of Maryland to identify methods to improve the paratransit service. It is critical that this study is performed by an independent third party. The legislature has required the Maryland Department of Transportation's MTA to study and report on its paratransit service in the past, yet the areas of concern identified by the legislature in these requests remain today. MTI will provide an objective report to policymakers on MobilityLink service, quality, and workforce. The report will serve as an excellent starting point for reforming MobilityLink.

The MobilityLink Paratransit Service Improvements Study will compare MobilityLink with other paratransit entities around the country to identify the best method for service delivery. It will conduct a cost-benefit analysis of paratransit service quality, reliability, and financial costs. The study will analyze and compare paratransit services nationwide, including turnover and absenteeism rates, average length of employment, preventable accidents, average wages and benefits, and career training opportunities, among other workforce metrics.

MobilityLink riders will also be consulted to provide valuable input about their experiences using the service. MTI will share its findings and recommendations with state and local officials. DRM is confident that this study will provide key information our state can use to ensure that MobilityLink service works optimally for its riders.

[Signatures continued on next page.]

For these reasons, we support SB 891. For more information or questions, contact:
Daria Pugh, Staff Attorney, Disability Rights Maryland, DariaP@DisabilityRightsMD.org or (443)
692-2487.

Respectfully submitted,

Daria Pugh
Disability Rights Maryland

Accessible Resources for Independence, Center for Independent Living
The Arc of Baltimore
The Arc of Maryland
Baltimore Transit Equity Coalition
Central Maryland Transportation Alliance
Consumers for Accessible Ride Services (CARS)
The Coordinating Center
Elders Climate Action Maryland
Fix Maryland Rail
Freedom Center, Center for Independent Living
Kennedy Krieger Institute: Maryland Center for Developmental Disabilities
Independence Now, Center for Independent Living
The League for People with Disabilities
Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council
Maryland Down Syndrome Association Coalition
Maryland Legislative Coalition
Maryland Sierra Club
National Federation of the Blind of Maryland
People on the Go
Shared Support Maryland, Inc.

SB 891 - Transportation - MobilityLink Paratransit

Uploaded by: Donna Edwards

Position: FAV



MARYLAND STATE & D.C. AFL-CIO

AFFILIATED WITH NATIONAL AFL-CIO

7 School Street • Annapolis, Maryland 21401-2096

Balto. (410) 269-1940 • Fax (410) 280-2956

President

Donna S. Edwards

Secretary-Treasurer

Gerald W. Jackson

**SB 891 - Transportation - MobilityLink Paratransit Service Improvements - Study
Senate Finance Committee
March 13, 2024**

SUPPORT

**Donna S. Edwards
President
Maryland State and DC AFL-CIO**

Madame Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 891. My name is Donna S. Edwards, and I am the President of the Maryland State and DC AFL-CIO. On behalf of the 300,000 union members in the state of Maryland, I offer the following comments.

The paratransit system in Maryland is clearly failing to meet the full needs of paratransit riders and workers. It is essential that the State studies the issue thoroughly and takes all parts of the problem into consideration.

SB 891 requires the Maryland Transportation Institute at the University of Maryland to conduct a study on the Maryland Transit Administration's ADA MobilityLink Paratransit service. This study is required to issue recommendations to improve the paratransit service and share its findings with the Governor, General Assembly, and County Executives within the MobilityLink service area.

In 2023, the U.S. Attorney's Office issued the results of their investigation of MobilityLink paratransit service and found violations of the Americans with Disabilities Act.¹ For years, MTA has contracted out its paratransit services to private contractors like MV Transit that have treated workers and riders poorly.²

SB 891 tasks the Maryland Transportation Institute with conducting the study. This outside independence is important and ensures that MTA is not tasked with investigating itself. SB 891 also requires studying not only rider concerns on all ADA performance metrics, but also requires workforce concerns, including: turnover rate, workplace injury rates, average wages and benefits, and morale.

For the future of paratransit in Maryland, we urge a favorable report on SB 891.

¹ Bryan P. Sears, "U.S. Attorney: Maryland paratransit system does not comply with ADA; lawsuit threatened." Maryland Matters. July 19, 2023.

² Daniel Zawodny, "Bedbugs and other reasons why MobilityLink drivers want a better contract." Baltimore Banner. August 23, 2024.

MD SB 891 Paratransit Study Written Testimony EC 3

Uploaded by: Emma Cleveland

Position: FAV



Amalgamated Transit Union

10000 New Hampshire Avenue, Silver Spring, MD 20903-1706
(301) 431-7100 Fax (301) 431-7117

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.

Emma Cleveland
State and Local Political Coordinator
Amalgamated Transit Union
10000 New Hampshire Avenue
Silver Spring MD 20903

SB 891 - CARS - F. Hartley Written Testimony FAV.

Uploaded by: Floyd Hartley

Position: FAV



SB 891: MobilityLink Paratransit Service Improvements Study
Senate Finance Committee
March 13, 2024

**Testimony of Floyd Hartley, Chair of Consumers for Accessible Ride Services
Position: Support**

My name is Floyd Hartley. I am a 71-year-old wheelchair user. I have relied on Mobility for the last 20 years. I am the chair of Consumers for Accessible Ride Services (CARS), an advocacy group for paratransit riders. I have been involved with CARS for about 18 years.

I wish I could have been with you in person to support SB 891, but it is too challenging for me to travel to Annapolis by paratransit. I could have ended up missing the whole hearing or getting stuck in Annapolis for many hours.

CARS supports the MobilityLink Study because paratransit is essential to the well-being of Marylanders with disabilities. Mobility riders need safe and reliable paratransit to access our communities. SB 891 creates an independent study of Mobility and its workforce, to identify ways we can make real, lasting improvements to Mobility.

I have seen the inadequacies of Mobility firsthand. Mobility riders have to deal with late pick-ups, excessively long rides, vehicles showing up at the wrong location or not at all, or equipment failures. Sometimes the heating or air conditioning in the vehicle does not work, and we have to travel in uncomfortable, or even dangerous conditions.

Mobility's service fluctuates. Sometimes, we see improvements after lawsuits. But then we see the same issues come back again, and again.

Mobility riders are often treated as second-class citizens. Sometimes doing one errand can take the whole day. We have to account for the thirty-minute window before and after our pick-up time for our ride to arrive, as well as a buffer in case our ride arrives late, and for a long transit time aboard Mobility.

We are often in fear that Mobility will not arrive and we will be stuck. This is especially true for people who use power wheelchairs. If a non-disabled person



misses their bus, they can call a taxi, or ask a friend for a ride. People who use power wheelchairs can't do that. If Mobility doesn't come after an appointment, we are stuck, with no safe way home.

We deserve better. We deserve safety and reliability in our public transit. We deserve to have Mobility studied by an objective and skilled team of researchers. This is necessary to make improvements to Mobility, so people with disabilities who use paratransit never feel like second-class citizens again.

For these reasons, CARS strongly supports SB 891 and urges a favorable report.

Respectfully,

Floyd Hartley

Jason Woody BMC Testimony - SB0891 Mobility Paratr

Uploaded by: Jason Woody

Position: FAV



March 12, 2024

**Senate Finance Committee
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT**

Transportation – MobilityLink Paratransit Service Improvements – Study

My name is Jason Woody and I am the Executive Director of B'More Clubhouse, a nonprofit mental health organization in Baltimore City. Our organization works with adults experiencing serious and persistent mental illness to focus on recovery through work. Through an integrative psychosocial recovery approach, our members access long term recovery support that assists them with obtaining employment, education, and housing, in addition to daily structure and socialization.

The majority of B'More Clubhouse members rely on MTA MobilityLink for their daily transportation needs. It is a critical service that unfortunately many of our folks find unreliable. Our members are frequently left wondering when or even if their rides will show up. This causes them undue stress on a routine basis. It is also common that B'More Clubhouse ends up covering the cost of an Uber/Lyft ride for members whose Mobility ride is extremely late (or never showed up). This of course presents a cost burden to our organization, which operates on a very limited budget.

MTA Mobility is a great service but in our opinion has failed to live up to reasonable expectations in terms of reliability. So on behalf of B'More Clubhouse I would like to offer our enthusiastic support of this legislation that would support a MobilityLink Service Improvements Study. I would also like to thank Senator McCray for his leadership on this important issue. Thank you.

2024 TCC SB 891 Senate Side.pdf

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Position: FAV



THE COORDINATING CENTER
INSPIRED SOLUTIONS

Committee: Senate Finance Committee

Bill Number: Senate Bill 891 - Transportation – MobilityLink Paratransit Service Improvement Study

Hearing Date: March 13, 2024

Position: Support

The Coordinating Center supports *Senate Bill 891 – Transportation – MobilityLink Paratransit Service Improvement Study*. This bill would commission a study on needed improvements in the MobilityLink Paratransit Service Program.

Our organization provides care coordination to clients enrolled in Community First Choice and many of Maryland Medicaid’s home and community-based service waivers. Many of our clients have mobility issues and rely on transportation program to travel for medical appointments, work, and family obligations. However, the paratransit services are not consistently available, making it challenging for our clients to get their basic needs met.

We ask for a favorable report. If we can provide any additional information that is helpful, please contact Robyn Elliott at relliott@policypartners.net.

SB0891-FIN-SUPP.pdf

Uploaded by: Nina Themelis

Position: FAV



COMMISSION ON AGING, RESOURCES AND EMPOWERMENT

James Campbell, Co-Chair

Olivia Farrow, Co-Chair

Brandon M. Scott, Mayor

SB0891

March 12, 2024

TO: Members of the Senate Finance Committee

FROM: James Campbell, Co-Chair
Olivia Farrow, Co-Chair
Baltimore City Commission on Aging, Resources and Empowerment

RE: Senate Bill 891 – Transportation - MobilityLink Paratransit Service
Improvements - Study

POSITION: FAVORABLE

Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Klausmeier, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Commission on Aging, Resources and Empowerment (CARE) **supports** Senate Bill (SB) 891. SB 891 requires the Maryland Transportation Institute at the University of Maryland to conduct a study to generate recommendations for improving the Maryland Transit Administration's ADA MobilityLink paratransit service.

Members of CARE are appointed by the Mayor and City Council to advise the City on issues of concern to older Baltimore City residents. In 2023, CARE conducted a series of listening sessions in Baltimore City to allow older City residents a forum to voice their concerns about services and resources. At each of these sessions, participants stated how important the MTA Mobility program was to them, but raised questions about efficiency, customer service, and access to the program. CARE believes that the study required by SB 891 will help address these concerns and lay the groundwork for a more robust paratransit service.

For these reasons, the Baltimore City Commission on Aging, Resources and Empowerment respectfully request a **favorable** report on SB 891.

Testimony in support of SB0891.pdf

Uploaded by: Richard KAP Kaplowitz

Position: FAV

SB0891_RichardKaplowitz_FAV
3/13/2022

Richard Keith Kaplowitz
Frederick, MD 21703-7134

TESTIMONY ON SB#0891 - POSITION: FAVORABLE

Transportation - MobilityLink Paratransit Service Improvements – Study

TO: Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Klausmeier and members of the Finance Committee

FROM: Richard Keith Kaplowitz

My name is Richard Kaplowitz. I am a resident of District 3. I am submitting this testimony in support of SB#0891, Transportation - MobilityLink Paratransit Service Improvements – Study

This bill will create a study group of experts to identify methods to improve the Maryland Transit Administration’s ADA MobilityLink paratransit service. My son, a long-term care patient, relies on this service to get to and from doctor appointments and to shop for himself. The service is frequently not available at the times or dates he needs it; he has been late being picked up for transit to and from his doctor’s appointments.

Maryland has a world class Maryland Transportation Institute at the University of Maryland that is equipped to undertake this study and report their findings and recommendations to the Governor and General Assembly and localities governing structures by July 1, 2025. The bill establishes the amount of and how this study should be funded.

Maryland legislators need good data to make good decisions on this or any other issue. This bill will lead to the acquisition of that data to make that possible. We need to take care of those who are most affected by this paratransit service to make it work for them and for Maryland. Funding this study is a first step to accomplishing that goal.

I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on SB0891.

SB 891_Transportation – MobilityLink Paratransit S

Uploaded by: tamika winkler

Position: FAV

CORY V. MCCRAY
Legislative District 45
Baltimore City

DEPUTY MAJORITY WHIP

Budget and Taxation Committee

Subcommittees

Chair, Health and Human Services

Vice Chair, Capital Budget

Executive Nominations Committee

Legislative Policy Committee

Joint Committee on Gaming Oversight



James Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street, Room 221
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3165 · 301-858-3165
800-492-7122 Ext. 3165
Cory.McCray@senate.state.md.us

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Vote Yes to Senate Bill 891

Bill Title: Transportation – Mobility Link Paratransit Service Improvements – Study

March 13, 2024

Dear Chair, Vice Chair and Members of the Committee:

I am here today to ask for support for Senate Bill 891, a Transportation – MobilityLink Paratransit Service Improvements – Study. This bill addresses a critical need within our state, seeking to enhance the Maryland Transit Administration's ADA MobilityLink paratransit service through a comprehensive study led by the Maryland Transportation Institute at the University of Maryland.

In recognizing the importance of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the essential role MobilityLink plays in providing accessible transportation to individuals with disabilities, this bill takes a thoughtful and pragmatic approach to identifying methods for improvement. The study outlined in the bill is thorough and well-considered, focusing on key aspects of ADA paratransit services nationwide.

The study mandates a comparative analysis of the MobilityLink service with similar entities across the nation. This includes a detailed examination of service structures, encompassing fleet ownership, maintenance, dispatch, reservations, scheduling, operators, mechanics, customer service, and quality assurance. Furthermore, the bill wisely calls for an assessment of the fiscal costs and savings associated with different paratransit service models, emphasizing both short- and long-term considerations.

The bill pays attention to performance metrics, aligning with the Federal Transit Administration's ADA Guidance. By analyzing on-time performance, missed trips, transit times, call center performance, customer complaints, and safety conditions, the study will provide valuable insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the current system. Equally commendable is the inclusion of workforce metrics, delving into turnover rates, average length of employment, absenteeism, accidents, workplace injuries, compensation claims, career training, advancement opportunities, wages, benefits, morale, and satisfaction. This holistic approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the human element within the paratransit services.

Furthermore, the bill emphasizes public input and feedback by soliciting comments from the public and MobilityLink riders, recognizing the importance of involving those directly impacted by the service. The recommendations developed as a result of this study are poised to drive meaningful and informed

improvements to the MobilityLink paratransit service, considering both financial implications and qualitative enhancements. To facilitate the implementation of this crucial study, the bill appropriately includes a provision for a budgetary appropriation of at least \$150,000 in the fiscal year 2026 budget. This financial commitment underscores the importance our state places on addressing the needs of individuals with disabilities and ensuring equitable access to transportation services.

Senate Bill 891 is a pragmatic and necessary step toward improving the ADA MobilityLink paratransit service. I urge you all to VOTE YES on senate bill 891 recognizing the positive impact it will have on the lives of our constituents who rely on accessible transportation services. Thank you.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Cory V. McCray". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "C" and a long horizontal stroke.

Cory V. McCray
45th District

SB891_MobilityLinkStudy_KennedyKrieger_Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Emily Arneson

Position: FWA

SB0891 - MTA - Mobility Study_LOI_FINAL.pdf

Uploaded by: Patricia Westervelt

Position: INFO

March 13, 2024

The Honorable Pamela Beidle
Chair, Senate Finance Committee
3 East, Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis Maryland 21401

RE: Letter of Information – Senate Bill 891 – Transportation – MobilityLink Paratransit Service Improvements – Study

Dear Chair Beidle and Committee Members:

The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) offers the following information on Senate Bill 891 for the Committee’s consideration.

Senate Bill 891 would require the Maryland Transportation Institute at the University of Maryland to conduct a study on the Maryland Transit Administration’s (MTA) Mobility paratransit service, with a report due by July 1, 2025.

The MTA operates Mobility paratransit, which is a specialized transit service available to those who, because of a functional or cognitive disability, are unable to get to a bus stop, wait unassisted at a stop or station or board or ride a bus or train by themselves. Mobility is a shared ride door-to-door service, which is federally required to operate within three-quarters of a mile radius of MTA’s fixed route service.

The MTA recognizes the critical service that Mobility provides to riders. To understand existing and future needs, the MTA will be undertaking an internal study of Mobility, including but not limited to six key tasks: the collection and review of existing information, interviews with Mobility riders and MTA staff, defining existing conditions, updating service strategies, ridership and fleet forecasting, and developing a fleet and operations management plan. As a result, MTA will be producing a 10-year projection on ridership and staffing levels needed to operate Mobility services, as well as determining information on system improvements and any necessary vehicle replacements. MTA would be happy to add the requirements of this bill to the existing study. MTA is currently expecting work to begin Spring 2024, with work completed in Fall 2024.

Additionally, MTA is currently engaged in discussions with the United States Department of Justice (DoJ) to resolve a service complaint and DoJ letter finding noncompliance. As a result of these discussions, the MTA would request to be the responsible party for conducting a study on Mobility improvements. The agency is committed to continuous improvements for our paratransit riders and believes that MTA is best situated to complete the study.

The Honorable Pamela Beidle
Page Two

The Maryland Department of Transportation respectfully requests that the Committee consider this information when deliberating Senate Bill 891.

Respectfully submitted,

Melissa Einhorn
Director of Governmental Affairs
Maryland Transit Administration
410-767-0820

Pilar Helm
Director of Government Affairs
Maryland Department of Transportation
410-865-1090