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February 16, 2023

Delegate Ben Barnes, Chair
Delegate Mark S. Chang, Vice Chair
House Office Building, Room 121
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Support for House Bill 341 – Transportation – Statewide Transportation Improvement Programs and Transportation Improvement Programs – Equity Impacts
Hearing before the House Appropriations on February 21, 2023

Position: Support (FAV)

Dear Honorable Members of the House Appropriations Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of the Baltimore Regional Housing Partnership (BRHP). I am writing to express our support for House Bill 341. This legislation will ensure that equity be considered when State transportation plans, reports, and goals are developed.

The Baltimore Regional Housing Partnership (BRHP) is a non-profit organization that expands housing choices for families with low incomes, who have historically been excluded from housing in well-resourced neighborhoods, helping them to access and transition successfully to safe, healthy, and economically vibrant communities. As the Regional Administrator for the Baltimore Housing Mobility Program, BRHP has opened pathways to a better future for low-income families for nearly 10 years. BRHP currently provides over 4,300 low-income families rental assistance in the form of the Housing Choice Vouchers and couples that with counseling supports for families as they move from areas of concentrated poverty to areas of opportunity in Baltimore City and the five surrounding counties.

BRHP is dedicated to helping achieve racially and socially equitable public policy that ensures families with low income have access to quality and affordable homes in communities of their choice. We support HB 341 because it will help to ensure that transportation policies and projects are inclusive and equitable by requiring an equity analysis for each transportation project and how it may impact low-income and minority communities. We know firsthand that mobility directly impacts access to opportunities for all protected classes. Safe access to employment, quality schools, and health care represent a few of the many factors that may influence housing choice. We hope that this legislation provides an opportunity to investigate the importance of community cohesion and inclusivity in the decision-making process, thereby providing greater clarification of the burdens encountered by excluded communities when affordable housing and transportation planning remain uncoordinated and fail to address the needs of transportation disadvantaged households.

The Baltimore Regional Housing Partnership is an equal housing opportunity provider.





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It is often difficult to set equity goals that can be measured qualitatively and quantitatively. To effectively assess equity as it relates to transit, impact analyses should include headways, transit locations and routing, employment patterns and constraints and the disparities amongst racial and ethnic communities as well impacts on persons with disabilities involved. Such analyses can inform goal setting for agencies to better serve low-income and minority communities.

Much of the transit system is used by divergent populations, yet many of the goals are developed by those who do not use public transportation. An important dimension of equity is including the perceptions and insight from historically disadvantaged populations and this bill specifically addresses this by prioritizing local feedback. It seems all too often that locals who know and use public transportation may either not be consulted at all or be afterthoughts in the process. By creating ways to incorporate diverse populations in the setting and valuation of goals, a more equitable basis can be reached.

Background

Maryland spends 80% of its transportation budget on roads, while leaving the public transit system in shambles in comparison to every neighboring state. The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) allocates 77% of its total budget to the State Highway Administration but only 2% to the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA). The MTA serves the majority of the public transit market which is mostly made up of African-Americans and low-income individuals with no access to automobile transportation. This insufficient allocation of funds for MTA is an overt display of discriminatory practices in Maryland transportation policy. This bill will help to ensure that public transit policies undergo an equity analysis and meet the needs of underserved communities to access opportunities for gainful employment. All policies in Maryland must lead with equity otherwise our most vulnerable communities will continue to be left behind.

Equity Implications

This legislation requires that matters of equity are at the forefront of transportation plans, reports, and goals developed. Racial inequality is deeply embedded in Maryland's history of transportation policies, from highways dividing black communities and the cancelation of the Red Line route—transportation equity is an urgent matter that targets low-income families, people with disabilities, and many marginalized communities.

BRHP appreciates your consideration and urges the Committee to issue a favorable report for HB 341.

Sincerely,

Adria Crutchfield
Executive Director
Baltimore Regional Housing Partnership

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