



CHILDREN'S ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH &  
PROTECTION ADVISORY COUNCIL

February 28, 2023

The Honorable Kumar P. Barve  
Chair, Environment and Transportation  
House Office Building, Room 251  
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: House Bill 9 Equity in Transportation Sector - Guidelines and Analyses

Dear Chair Barve,

The Children's Environmental Health & Protection Advisory Council (CEHPAC) respectfully submits this letter regarding House Bill 9 - Equity in Transportation Sector - Guidelines and Analyses.

This bill requires the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) to consider equity when developing transportation goals and indicators. Before any reduction in service, or reduction in a capital expansion project, HB 9 requires MDOT to conduct an equity analysis and a cost-benefit analysis with considerations for impacts on economic development, employment, health, education, and environmental justice.

Transit infrastructure is part of our built environment and impacts health by providing access to school, food, jobs, and healthcare, while also reducing pollution and greenhouse gas emissions and increasing physical activity. Despite these benefits, public transit in Maryland (especially in Baltimore) often fails to get people to their destinations in a reasonable amount of time. This is especially concerning since the majority of transit-users in Maryland are low-income people of color (who were also more likely to be considered essential workers during the COVID shutdown).

CEHPAC believes **increasing equitable access to safe, reliable transit will improve the health of children** in several ways. Firstly, those who rely on transit to get to school will be less likely to be tardy and miss classes, improving their educational attainment, which is a well-documented determinant of health. Reliable and safe transit to school will reduce anxiety about tardiness, improving mental health in addition to school performance. Similarly, those children old enough to work will be able to get to their jobs in a reasonable amount of time and not have to worry about getting fired. Holding a job increases food insecurity and mental health outcomes.

Secondly, the use of public transit decreases reliance on personal vehicles, leading to lower air pollution and thus lower rates of respiratory diseases like asthma. Public transit and reduced reliance on cars lowers air pollution thus respiratory disease rates, improving overall public health, reducing visits to the ER, and time away from school or work.

Finally, those who use public transportation tend to be more physically active since they need to get from their home to the transit stop, and then from the transit stop to their destination. Increased physical activity leads to fewer children suffering from overweight and obesity, both of which are linked to diabetes and many other adverse health outcomes. The above examples represent just some connections between transit use and health.

CEHPAC also believes the state could do better when it comes to equity in transit access and funding. Children of color and low-income families are more likely to rely on transit but in Baltimore are more likely to have longer commute times and live near fewer transit stops. These children also already suffer from increased exposure to pollution, higher rates of adverse health effects, such as asthma, and increased stress levels. However, in 2020 the MDOT/MTA proposed a permanent 20% cut for the core bus service in Baltimore (which has 83% Black ridership)

but only a 4-8% temporary cut for commuter rail service (which has 76% white ridership). This legislation would ensure that equity is considered during such proposals and other policy changes.

As defined in statute (Md. Code Ann., Health-General §§ 13-1501 thru 1506), CEHPAC seeks to ensure that the rules, regulations, and standards adequately protect the health of children from environmental hazards. CEHPAC's goal is to enable children in Maryland to grow up in a safe and healthy environment. Our duties include providing input to the General Assembly on legislation that may impact environmental hazards that affect the health of children.

In establishing CEHPAC, the Maryland General Assembly clearly identified children's environmental health as a priority for the State. CEHPAC is concerned about the impact of potential transit cuts and existing inefficiencies in our transit system on children's health. CEHPAC urges the legislature to adopt policies that require both an equity analysis and a health impact assessment routinely be performed before major changes to state and local transportation policies.

CEHPAC looks forward to working with the General Assembly on this and other issues, we appreciate your leadership. Please note, that the opinions of the Council expressed in this letter do not necessarily reflect that of the Department of Health or any other State agency.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Megan Weil Latshaw". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'M' and 'L'.

Megan Weil Latshaw, PhD MHS  
On Behalf of the Children's Environmental Health and Protection Advisory Council