

**Testimony in Support of Resolution 21-0056R
From Front Door To Schoolhouse Door**

**Education, Workforce, and Youth Committee
May 5, 2022, 10:00 a.m.**

The Fund for Educational Excellence is in support of Baltimore City Council Resolution 21-0056R: From Front Door to Schoolhouse Door. This resolution would address several of the recommendations outlined in our 2021 report, [*NOT IN SERVICE*](#), to improve conditions for the safe travel of Baltimore City Public Schools students to and from school.

Twenty-nine thousand (29,000) City Schools students rely on State-run MTA public transit to get to and from school; we estimate that they make up 18% of annual ridership on MTA core service. From interviews with a representative sample of 274 City Schools high school students, we learned that safety on the commute to school is a primary concern for students:

- A number of students are uncomfortable or uneasy during at least part of the trip.
- Many students feel a need to be cautious and vigilant while commuting to or from school and to be very aware of their surroundings.
- Students feel unsafe when they have to travel early in the morning or after dark; navigate car traffic and unsafe driving; or are surrounded by a crowd of unfamiliar people on transit or at transfer points.
- Arguments and physical fights between adults on public transit happen frequently.
- A number of female students are sexually harassed by older men on their trip to or from school, making them feel uncomfortable and, at times, frightened.
- It is often very dark when students leave practice or an evening shift at work. Student concerns about safety on public transit have, at times, meant having to quit a team or a job or not being allowed to participate or apply in the first place.
- To ensure their safety, many students also try to keep a low profile and avoid interactions with people they do not know while traveling on public transit.
- Some students intentionally avoid specific areas while walking to or from bus stops or train stations, and a few students say that they avoid certain bus routes or bus stops.

Our recommendations to make City Schools student commutes safer are drawn from our interviews with students, during which we asked them directly what should be done to improve conditions:

- Students told us that better lighting and more shelters at bus stops would make them feel

safer as they travel to and from school.

- In addition, the City of Baltimore and the MTA should jointly develop an initiative to combat sexual harassment on transit and at or around transit stations and bus stops.

Since the release of [NOT IN SERVICE](#) in June 2021, we have shared our findings and recommendations with MTA and City Schools leadership, state and federal legislators, gubernatorial candidates, transit experts, business groups, and student and parent groups. We are actively working to amplify student voices and push legislators and agencies to respond to student needs in the following ways:

- Produced docuseries on student transit highlighting two students' commutes. Watch the videos [here](#).
- Partnered with Baltimoreans for Educational Equity (BEE) and Councilmember Odette Ramos to hold a City Council hearing in December 2021.
 - During this hearing, MDOT MTA Administrator, Holly Arnold, committed to launching an anti-harassment campaign and youth advisory council in 2022.
- Co-hosted a [Community Convening](#) with BEE on March 1, 2022: Students and teachers talked about the challenges students face getting to school and discussed ways to support new State legislation that would address transit frequency and reliability.
- Currently working in partnership with MTA and City Schools to form a youth advisory council.
- Supported a student transit bill in the 2022 General Assembly session that established a workgroup for transit innovation, extended funding for City Schools to transport eligible students to and from school on MTA, provided students the option to use the Charmpass app, and covered transit costs for Youthworkers during the summer.

The Fund is encouraged by the Council's recommendations to improve the safety of transit riders, and we believe that implementation of these recommendations in concert with City agencies and MDOT MTA will yield significant improvements to students' experiences. We urge the Council's Committee on Education, Workforce, and Youth to pass this resolution and take action on these recommendations.

Sincerely,
Corrie Schoenberg
Senior Program Director
Fund for Educational Excellence