



May 2, 2023

Senator Anne Beebe-Center (Chair)
Representative Suzanne Salisbury (Chair)
Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety
State House Room 436
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Re: Support (with Amendment) An Act to Protect Maine's Transit Employees

Dear Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury, and Honorable Members of the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety:

On behalf of the Maine Transit Association (MTA), we write to express our support (pending amendments) for LD 1796/SP 721, An Act to Protect Maine's Transit Employees.

The MTA represents 20 public and non-profit transit agencies across our state. Our members provide mobility to Maine people and visitors in both urban and rural areas from Presque Isle to York County and from Downeast to the western mountains.

The MTA recognizes the imperative to do all we can to protect our state's front-line transit workers. Transit employees work under very challenging conditions every day. They are asked to operate heavy equipment in chaotic traffic conditions, maintain schedules to get passengers to where they need to go on-time, manage on-board technology that grows more complex every year, and serve passengers with courtesy, helpfulness and professionalism. In the course of performing their duties, front-line transit workers must occasionally manage difficult engagements with passengers who may have addictions, mental health challenges, or other behavioral problems.

Nationally, assaults on transit workers are increasing. Maine's transit systems are safe and we do not see the same scale of increase in security incidents that are occurring in major US cities. However, as we work to remain vigilant and minimize the risk of harm to our employees, **MTA supports the provisions included in LD 1796 which would make assault on a transit employee a Class C crime, along with the posting of signs notifying the public of the penalties for assaulting a transit employee.**

De-escalation training is key to help make sure employees have the tools to manage difficult situations and can prevent harm to employees and passengers. However, **the MTA does not support the inclusion of de-escalation training as part of the law** for the following reasons: 1) it constitutes an unfunded mandate, 2) there is no enforcement mechanism, and 3) most, if not all, statewide transit agencies already provide this training.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue.

Respectfully,

Greg Jordan
MTA Board President
Executive Director
Greater Portland Transit District
Direct Line: 207-517-3025
E-mail: gjordan@gpmetro.org

Chad Heid
MTA Board Treasurer
Executive Director
Biddeford-Saco-Old Orchard Beach Transit District
Direct Line: 207-283-3645
E-mail: cheid@bsoobtransit.org

Thomas Reinauer
MTA Board Vice President
Transportation Director
York County Community Action Agency
Direct Line: 207.459.2930
E-mail: Thomas.Reinauer@yccac.org

Erin Bingham
MTA Board Secretary
Transportation Director
Kennebec Valley Action Program
Direct Line: 207-859-1543
E-mail: ebingham@kvcap.org