

TESTIMONY OF MILO VICTORIA
ASSISTANT GENERAL MANAGER FOR BUS SERVICE
WASHINGTON METROPOLITAN AREA TRANSIT AUTHORITY

BEFORE

THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA'S
COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND THE JUDICIARY

ON

BILL 17-233, the

“TRANSIT OPERATOR PROTECTION AND ENHANCED PENALTY

ACT OF 2007”

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 2007

JOHN A. WILSON BUILDING

ROOM 412 11:00 AM

Good Morning, Chairman Mendelson other members of the Council of the District of Columbia's Committee on Public Safety and the Judiciary and staff. My name is Milo Victoria, and I am the Assistant General Manager for Bus Services for the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA). It is indeed a pleasure for me to be here this morning to offer WMATA's testimony in support of Bill 17-233, the "Transit Operator Protection and Enhanced Penalty Act of 2007."

I would like to start my testimony by publicly thanking Councilmember Graham and all of the bill's co-sponsors for their support of Metrobus and its operators. We believe this bill will go a long way in improving the conditions and situations that many transit operators must deal with while attempting to provide basic transportation services in the District of Columbia. Assaults on operators have become a problem for transit agencies throughout the Washington Metropolitan Area. It is our hope that the District bill will become the model for legislation that is introduced in the other legislative bodies in this region.

In each of the last five years, there has been an increase in the number of assaults on Metrobus operators. These assaults run the gamut of offenses and include: spitting on operators; striking operators with closed fist, sticks, bricks and poles; assaults with deadly weapons (for example, guns and knives); fondling and attempting to undress female operators.

In calendar year 2006, eighty-three (83) Metrobus operator assaults throughout the region were reported to the Metrobus Operations Control Center where Bus Supervisors and Transit Police or Metropolitan Police Department units were dispatched. Of the 83 assaults reported to the Operations Control Center, 68 of those assaults occurred in the District of Columbia on District of Columbia Metrobus routes. Of the 83 reported assaults, arrests were made in 34 of the cases. These assaults not only put our drivers in harm's way, they also put passengers on the bus and pedestrians and motorists on the public streets in jeopardy. We shudder to think of the injuries that may result from a driver losing control of a vehicle after being assaulted or hit by a brick -- or some other object -- while operating his or her vehicle. Assaults on our drivers also affect our bottom line, since Fiscal Year 2001 through today, assaults on Bus and Train Operators have resulted in a lost of 8,439 works days at a cost of \$3,304,145.

Our operators are quite concerned for their welfare, especially those operators who must operate vehicles during the late evening hours. Most of the assaults take place near the end of the routes away from the central business district. Many of these assaults happen with few or no other passengers on the bus. There have been cases where brave members of the public have come to the aid of operators who where being assaulted. There are other cases where citizens chose not to get involved.

Let me provide you with some examples of what our operators face:

Example one:

A male patron boarded a bus, and while the bus was moving jumped on the operator, punched her in the face and started ripping off her blouse, bra and pants. The operator successfully brought the bus to a stop opened the door and began to fight the patron, pushing him off of her. The patron then ran from the bus. The operator received bruises to the right side of her face and a bloody nose.

Example two:

After all other passengers alighted the bus, a single male passenger came up the aisle and stood behind the operator. When the bus came to the next stop, the passenger attacked the operator hitting her with his fist. The operator fought back until the passenger ran from the bus. The operator had to be transported by ambulance for medical attention. She suffered forehead abrasions, her right eye was swollen shut, and she was bleeding from both her nose and mouth.

Example three:

Two juveniles boarded the bus and pulled a gun on the operator. One of the youth walked to the rear of the bus and exited through the back door. The juvenile with the gun attempted to strike the operator with the gun and the operator began to fight him. The operator and the juvenile fell out of the bus, the juvenile got up and ran. The operator injured both of his knees, his hand and lower back during the fall.

And finally:

Example four:

Someone in a group of juveniles threw brick at a Metrobus causing the front glass to shatter. The operator was transported to the hospital with lacerations to her face and glass in her eyes.

Several of our operators have been severely injured during these assaults. Some have suffered sever trauma at the hands of our customers. This is a dangerous situation that needs to be corrected. We continue to install cameras on buses that we hope will record some these incidents and lead to the apprehension and prosecution of some of these individuals. We have increased the number of Metro Transit Police officers dedicated to riding buses undercover and our scout cars patrol troubled buses routes. We cannot watch all buses at all times -- during the day and night.

We believe this legislation --which will increase the penalty and fine for individuals who assault a transit operator while the operator is providing transit service or otherwise prohibits an operator from operating their vehicle-- will reduce these incidents in the future.

We thank the Council of the District of Columbia for providing regional leadership with this bill and we do hope that it will be passed into law soon. Our operators and our patrons are depending on it.

Thank you once again for this opportunity to testify in support of the bill and I will be happy to answer any questions that the Committee may have.