

January 14, 2021

The Honorable Edward J. Markey
U.S. Senator, State of Massachusetts
255 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Ayanna Pressley
U.S. Representative, 7th Congressional District
of Massachusetts
1108 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Markey and Representative Pressley,

Thank you for sponsoring Senate Bill 4278/ House Resolution 7389, "The Freedom to Move Act," which would create a federal grant program aimed at supporting local efforts to provide fare-free transit service. AC Transit is pleased to offer this letter of support.

The Alameda-Contra Costa Transit District (AC Transit) is the third-largest public bus system in California, serving 13 cities and adjacent unincorporated areas in Alameda and Contra Costa counties. We have provided essential public transportation to the residents of the San Francisco East Bay since 1960 and are committed to continuing to provide efficient and reliable bus service to those who rely on us every day, particularly during these challenging times. In addition to supporting the essential workers who have kept our region functioning during the pandemic, AC Transit serves vulnerable populations who rely on us as their primary means of transportation:

- 42% of our trips made by riders who have no access to a vehicle;
- 26% of our riders use a fare discount (i.e., are youth, seniors or individuals with a disability); and
- 65% of our riders have a household income of less than \$50,000.

AC Transit recognizes the benefits that a free fare system would offer, especially to low-income workers and families, youth, seniors and individuals with disabilities. We also acknowledge the environmental improvements that result when more people get out of their cars and ride public transit. That is why, earlier this year, we took a closer look at how free fares might work for us. What we found was that if the District were to make its entire system completely free, we would forego \$57 million per year in fare revenues. Were AC Transit to operate a free fare system, funding would be needed to offset these losses. The \$5 billion competitive grant program outlined in "The Freedom to Move Act" is an important first step towards offsetting these significant fare revenue losses.

AC Transit also supports the Act's call to use funds to improve the safety and quality of public transportation service, particularly in low-income and historically underserved communities. This priority is in keeping with our ongoing efforts to serve those most in need. During the pandemic we have prioritized local riders by not reducing service on any lines that serve disadvantaged communities in our service area. In August we launched the East Bay's first bus rapid transit (BRT) system. The BRT offers increased frequency and reliability, enhanced accessibility, and improved safety in a diverse population

of approximately 170,000 people, many of whom are low-income and transit dependent. Looking ahead, our Clean Corridors Plan specifies that whenever the District purchases zero-emissions buses they will be deployed into disadvantaged communities first. AC Transit's mission is to connect our communities with safe, reliable, sustainable service, and "The Freedom to Move Act" offers strategies and support that can help us fulfill this mission.

Lastly, AC Transit recognizes the disparate impacts that fare enforcement efforts across the country have had on low-income riders and communities of color. For this reason, the District's Board of Directors enacted an ordinance to impose administrative penalties for fare evasion, effectively decriminalizing the offense. We are committed to transit equity and are gratified to see it included in the "The Freedom to Move Act."

Thank you for proposing this important legislation. We encourage you to work with our allies at the American Public Transportation Association and members of The Bus Coalition to find additional monies and support to advance "The Freedom to Move Act's" worthy goals. Please don't hesitate to contact me, General Manager Michael Hursh at mhursh@actransit.org, Executive Director of External Affairs, Marketing & Communications Beverly Greene at bgreen@actransit.org, or Director of Legislative Affairs & Community Relations Claudia Burgos at cburgos@actransit.org.

Sincerely,

Elsa Ortiz
President, AC Transit Board of Directors

Michael Hursh
General Manager, AC Transit

Cc. AC Transit Board of Directors