

## Testimony of Clint Sobratti On Supplemental Appropriation to the FY22 Operating Budget, Montgomery County Government, Department of Transportation, Transit Services

Tuesday, February 1, 2022

I'm Clint Sobratti. I'm was a bus operator and now I am a transit coordinator with RideOn.

I am here today to urge you to pass the County Executive's supplemental appropriation for the Montgomery County Department of Transportation to increase salaries for me and my fellow RideOn employees.

The great resignation has hit everywhere – people are realizing that they don't want to go day in and day out to a job where they aren't happy and feel valued. If there are better jobs to be had elsewhere, they know, thanks to the pandemic and the robust labor market, that they can leave.

That's happening in Montgomery County at RideOn. We're down at least 100 employees. We're seeing cuts in service just when we were nearing pre-pandemic needs for service.

I like my job and I love Montgomery County. I have been with the County for 11 years at RideOn. What we're seeing right now is a crisis – bus operators and others at RideOn have watched the salaries and benefits improve at the neighboring Washington Metro Area Transit Authority while we've watched our salaries and benefits stagnate. Morale is awful.

A market compatibility study shows that RideOn bus operators earn a first-year salary of \$45,776 compared to \$53,063 for WMATA bus operators. Additionally, RideOn bus operators can't reach their peak pay until 24 years into their careers. By then, their salary is nearly \$7,000 less than their counterparts at WMATA.

Bus operators and transit coordinators never stopped working when the pandemic hit. We are one of the few departments in Montgomery County that has stayed operational and continues to stay operational throughout this crisis.

Over the past two years, we've shuttled our friends, neighbors, and others in the community to and from work, or wherever they wanted or needed to go, every day, day and night. We open and close this county. We're on call every day.

Bus Rapid Transit and other initiatives to improve the use of mass transit in this county are great goals – ones I support fully – but we cannot accomplish these goals without quality drivers and the human infrastructure needed to operate the system. If WMATA is offering the better pay and benefits, we will keep seeing employees leave. We need better salaries to increase recruitment and retain our employees. I urge you to pass this special appropriation. Thank you.