



OFFICE OF RACIAL EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE


Marc Elrich
County Executive

Tiffany Ward, Director
Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice

MEMORANDUM

November 23, 2021

To: Jennifer Bryant, Director
Office of Management and Budget

From: Tiffany Ward, Director
Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice 

Re: Supplemental Appropriation: REIA #22-26 Transit Service Bus Operators

- I. **FINDING:** The Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice (ORESJ) finds that Supplemental Appropriation #22-26 is likely to advance racial equity and social justice in County, as it raises the wages of transit operators and coordinators who are disproportionately people of color. Raising the wages of these positions contributes to reductions in racial and ethnic disparities in median household income and housing cost burden.
- II. **BACKGROUND:** The purpose of Supplemental Appropriation #22-26 is to make a market comparability wage adjustment for the Transit Bus Operator and Transit Coordinator job classifications in Montgomery County. Adjusting wages so that they are more closely aligned with those of Washington Metro Area Transit Authority (WMATA), will result in an additional \$3,000 at entry level and an additional \$300,000 over a 30-year career for employees in these job classifications.

To understand the extent to which wage adjustments will advance racial equity, it is important to consider the demographic characteristics of the people who fill these positions compared to the workforce or County overall, as well as the larger context of how wage adjustments will affect those navigating structural inequities in the economy.

In the US, historical and current practices of occupational segregation¹ shape labor market opportunities and outcomes by race, ethnicity, and gender. Together with racial

¹ <https://equitablegrowth.org/factsheet-u-s-occupational-segregation-by-race-ethnicity-and-gender/>

inequities in access to housing, lending, and education, occupational segregation helps explain why people of color are overrepresented in low-wage frontline jobs and continue to face constant barriers to advancement². Overtime, these inequities have created broad wage inequality by race, ethnicity, and gender, contributing to disparities in income and wealth—a critical driver of housing cost burden.

The TransitCenter conducted an analysis using American Community Survey data, which revealed degrees of occupational segregation (at the time of the pandemic) between frontline and non-frontline workers in the US transit workforce. For the analysis, bus operators, cleaners, mechanics, and those who could not work from home were considered frontline workers, while managers, service planners, and others who could work from home were considered non-frontline workers. The analysis showed that Black and Hispanic workers make up larger shares of frontline positions (and smaller shares of non-frontline positions) than their representation in the transit workforce overall.

Race/ethnicity	Entire transit workforce		Frontline workers		Non-frontline workers	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Asian	25,315	3.5%	15,600	2.9%	9,715	5.1%
Black	186,803	25.7%	148,396	27.6%	38,407	20.2%
Hispanic/Latino	95,686	13.2%	75,545	14.1%	20,141	10.6%
White	401,833	55.2%	284,264	52.9%	117,569	61.7%

Source: Table reproduced from data analyzed by TransitCenter. Available here:

<https://transitcenter.org/protecting-transit-workers-racial-justice/>

This disproportionality extends to socioeconomic characteristics, where 4.9% of the transit workforce lives below the federal poverty line, compared to 5.4% of frontline workers and 3.5% in non-frontline occupations. Disparities also affect the highest levels of leadership in transit agencies, women make up 39% of the transit workforce but only 3% of system CEOs and there are only two non-white CEOs across the 15 largest US agencies³.

Available local data indicate a similar disproportionality in the County's transit workforce. ORESJ has calculated the following racial and ethnic breakdown of transit operators and coordinators. Since we do not know the racial and ethnic makeup of the transit services division overall, we cannot determine whether the below makeup is comparable to other job classifications in the agency. Instead, we've used County

² <https://www.policylink.org/sites/default/files/Advancing%20Frontline%20Employees%20of%20Color.pdf>

³ <https://transitcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/HR.pdf>

demographics to determine whether the representation of people of color in transit operator and transit coordinator job classifications is proportional to their representation in the County overall.

Race/ethnicity	Transit Bus Operator		Transit Coordinator		County population %
American Indian/Alaska Native	<5*	<0%	0	0%	.7%
Asian	21	3%	<5*	6%	15.6%
Black	495	72%	25	76%	20.1%
Hispanic/Latino	82	12%	<5*	6%	20.1%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	<5*	<0%	0	0%	.1%
White (alone, not Hispanic or Latino)	25	4%	<5*	6%	42.9%
Two or more races	12	2%	0	0%	3.5%
No response	47	7%	<5	6%	0
Total	687		35		

*To maintain data privacy, these responses were suppressed. For the calculation purposes, the value of 2 was given to each instance where data suppression occurred. These estimates do not affect the overwhelming evidence that transit operators and transit coordinators who are Black make up larger shares of these job classifications than the overall percentage of Black residents in the County.

Source: Workforce statistics come from Personnel Management Regulation (PMR) Assignments Oracle Dashboard. County population data is from the American Community Survey, 2019 estimates. Available here: <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/montgomerycountymaryland/RHI225219#RHI225219>

What is evident from this data is that Black residents make up about 20% of the County population but more than 70% of transit operators and coordinators. Conversely, White residents make up 42.9% of the county population, but less than 10% of transit operators and coordinators. More research would need to be done to determine the exact cause of this disproportionality but the above-described racial disparities and inequities in education and employment likely play a role. Based on this data, wage increases for transit operator and transit coordinator positions are more likely to benefit workers of color, particularly given that more than 70% of employees in both categories are Black. Wage adjustments are therefore likely to contribute to reductions in median household income gaps and disparities in the percent of residents with gross rents more than 30% of household income in the County. See data below:

Median Household Income by Race and Ethnicity, 2017

Race/ethnicity	Montgomery County, MD
Asian	\$109,147
Black	\$72,587
Hispanic/Latino	\$71,847
White	\$119,426
Other	\$75,723

Source: Montgomery County, Maryland Office of Legislative Oversight Montgomery County Racial Equity Profile. Available here:

<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OLO/Resources/Files/2019%20Reports/RevisedOLO2019-7.pdf>

Gross Rent more than 30 Percent of Household Income in Last 12 Months, 2017

Race/ethnicity	Montgomery County, MD
Asian	42.7%
Black	54.5%
Hispanic/Latino	62.6%
White	44.7%
Other	71.6%

Source: Montgomery County, Maryland Office of Legislative Oversight Montgomery County Racial Equity Profile. Available here:

<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OLO/Resources/Files/2019%20Reports/RevisedOLO2019-7.pdf>

cc: Christopher Conklin, Director, Department of Transportation
Ken Hartman, Director, Strategic Partnerships, Office of the County Executive