

Written Testimony of Robert A. Nugent,
General Manager Topeka Metropolitan Transit Authority

Committee on Federal and State Affairs
Hearing on HOUSE BILL No. 2808

“Creating the crimes of causing harm to a public transportation
employee and aggravated causing harm to a public transportation employee.”

February 29, 2024

Chairperson and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 2808. My name is Robert A. Nugent, and I am the General Manager of the Topeka Metropolitan Transit Authority (TMTA) and a long-standing member of the Kansas Public Transit Association. On behalf of the employees of TMTA and the varied and numerous transit workers in the State of Kansas I offer the following comments.

Any assault on our public employees is an assault on us all. What is not necessarily known about the transit industry is that dozens of incidents of attacks, assaults, harassment, and verbal confrontations occur on a regular basis and are never known to the public. Attacks like these not only put the transit worker at risk, but potentially endanger passengers and other road users.

The overwhelming majority of these incidents occur inside our vehicles and are very much removed from any immediate assistance. Over the years TMTA and other transit systems have made efforts to improve the immediate risk through de-escalation training, as well as the installation of panic buttons, video surveillance, and various barriers both in our buses and facilities. But as you know the number of violent incidents continues to rise, not only in our service but in the community.

Transit workers, and especially bus operators, are the face of our transportation systems and help us provide critical services for our communities. This was never so evident as during the recent pandemic. Their courage and commitment played a valuable role in helping to maintain vital access to services such as medical care, groceries, and employment.

No one should be scared or in fear of their life when going to work. Our transit workers deserve the same respect and protection afforded to other public employees who are at risk of being assaulted on the job. I encourage you to support this important legislation and to advance the safety of our transit workers.