

March 11, 2025

**Senator Floyd Prozanski  
Senate Committee on Judiciary  
Oregon State Legislature  
900 Court St. NE  
Salem, OR 97301**

Re: Support for SB 1124

Chair Prozanski and Members of the Committee:

TriMet is Oregon's largest transit provider, serving more than 1.6 million people across our 533-square mile service territory. Our fleet includes about 700 buses and over 140 MAX light rail cars. TriMet and the Oregon Transit Association are in strong support of Senate Bill 1124 to help support and protect public transit operators. Their work is an essential part of our transit system, which many Oregonians depend on for their transportation needs, and their safety is of paramount importance to TriMet.

The converging crises of behavioral health, addiction, and homelessness that we are seeing across Oregon are also manifesting themselves on our state's transit systems. Coming out of the pandemic, TriMet saw a marked increase in problematic behavior on our system including violent confrontations, harassment, vandalism and open drug use on our buses and trains. Although conditions have improved significantly since 2021, our frontline employees still encounter antisocial behavior more frequently.

TriMet employees (operators are TriMet's largest group of frontline employees) were the victims of over 200 physical assaults and attempted physical assaults in both 2022 and 2023. Our employees were verbally threatened or harassed over 400 times in both 2022 and 2023. We don't have data on incidents of spitting because instances of operators being spat on were so rare for most of TriMet's history, but we have seen a huge increase in reports of spitting since 2019.

In recognition of the hostility and dangers that transit operators sometimes face, it is already a Class C felony to intentionally, knowingly, or recklessly cause physical injury to a transit operator when they are in control of or operating a vehicle. It is also already a Class C felony to knowingly propel bodily fluids and other dangerous substances at a transit operator when they are in control of or operating a vehicle. However, these penalties do not protect operators in other vulnerable situations when they are not operating the vehicle. The driver's compartment of our MAX trains has long been separated from the passenger cabin. Due to increases in violence against operators in recent years, our bus operators now have a Plexiglas shield separating the driver's seat from the rest of the vehicle. Many of our operators didn't want the shield on their bus when it was introduced in 2016, but by 2020, many of our operators were asking for the area of coverage provided by these shields to be expanded.

The protection provided both by these shields, separated cabins and the enhanced assault penalties in our legal system disappear when our operators exit their vehicles for breaks, to use the restroom, or to investigate a mechanical issue with the vehicle. As should be the expectation for any job, our operators deserve to feel safe when they're at work. Senate Bill 1124 simply expands the application of existing state statute to apply in all circumstances when operators are on the job.

At TriMet and transit agencies around the state, experienced operators are retiring and quitting in droves. Many identify the harassment and threat of physical violence they experience as one of the primary reasons why.

Transit operators have challenging jobs, and the work they do is essential to the people who depend on them to get to work, to school, to the doctor and the grocery store. Please help protect our operators by passing Senate Bill 1124. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Myles Pengilly', is positioned above the typed name.

Myles Pengilly  
Director of Government Affairs  
TriMet