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To: Veterans Affairs Committee
Public Hearing

vatestimony@cga.ct.gov

Date: February 18, 2021

Re: **Proposed Bill No. 614 An Act Concerning Bus Public Transportation
Charges for Veterans**

Position: *Neither Opposed nor In Favor*

Dear Members of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs:

This testimony has been prepared to inform the Committee on the possible impacts that Proposed Bill No. 614 could have on public bus systems in Connecticut.

While the removal of barriers to public transportation is an important matter, and the intention of the proposed bill in this regard is clear, it is important to note that the bus systems in Connecticut do currently depend, in part, on rider fares to pay for the expenses associated with the provision of the services. The loss of revenue from the elimination or reduction of fares (any fares), would likely result in a reduction of service. A reduction in revenue would further jeopardize the current bus service levels.

Today, the average fare is about \$1.00. There are other discounted fares that are Federally required, including half fares for seniors and riders with disabilities and riders who receive Medicaid.

While there is likely no one who would object to honoring our veterans in the way envisioned by this bill, it is noteworthy that there are many groups who, if provided with the same free fares, would lead to additional declines in the funding available to provide bus services and a contraction of the services - unless the revenue is provided through another mechanism. There are several known rider groups like seniors, refugees, homeless individuals, people reentering society following incarceration, and those entering adult education programs, who may be in similar circumstances. Today, Proposed Bill No. 160 (*AAC Studying Public Transit Fares for Persons with Disabilities*) appears to be leading to the same type of proposal. SB 600 (*AAC Establishing a Program to Provide Bus Passes for Persons Who Are Homeless*) seeks the same.

We welcome everyone on-board the bus and remove barriers to mobility wherever we find them. While we work toward this, please keep in mind the current financial constraints of transit operators in the State and the importance of fare revenue to current operations. Help to identify alternative resources that would replace the forgone fares and allow for these types of special fare programs. We should do no harm to our current service levels. Always, where there is a proposed reduction in revenue of any amount, either through the provision of free fares or any other mechanism, there should be a corresponding increase in revenue from other sources to ensure the continued operation of our bus services.

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