



March 28, 2022

The Honorable Chris Holden
 California State Assembly
 1021 O Street, Suite 5650
 Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Assembly Bill 1919 — Fare-Free Youth Transit Passes – SUPPORT

Dear Assemblymember Holden:

We the undersigned organizations write in support of Assembly Bill 1919 to create a new generation of transit users, help underserved youth, reduce the number of cars on the road, decrease vehicle miles traveled, and thereby make real cuts in greenhouse gas emissions.

Assembly Bill 1919 would create a five-year pilot program for the purposes of offsetting the costs to transit agencies to offer a California Youth Transit Pass, a fare-free transit pass for youth 25 years or younger with California residency, regardless of immigration status. The bill would require the department to submit reports on the outcomes of the program and the funding conditions associated with offering free youth transit passes, the status of transit pass programs statewide, and whether these provisions lead to reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and vehicle miles traveled.

We must take every viable step we can to build ridership, maximize vehicle trip reduction, and legitimate our large-scale investments in infrastructure—from high-speed rail to local transit systems—to address climate change, equity, and environmental justice. The [AB 285 Research Papers](#), which evaluated California’s state and regional transportation plans and their prospects for attaining state goals found that “programs with the largest funding address few of the state goals in their statutory description, criteria, or wording, whereas several of the programs that address the most state goals are among the least-funded programs.” Well-designed youth pass programs have been

shown to significantly increase ridership quickly and have a direct and immediate impact on GHG emissions and air pollution.

Study after study has shown that the kind of program that AB 1919 would create is the most successful way to expand access to fare-free transportation for our youth and help reduce current transportation inequities affecting millions of California:

- In January 2020, the California Legislature [funded research by the University of California Institute of Transportation Studies](#) to review reduced and/or fare-free transit fare programs in California and confirmed that programs structured like “insurance” programs can be “good for both riders and transit agencies.” The report found that to achieve their full potential, youth pass programs should be integrated into comprehensive policies to achieve California’s social and environmental goals.
- Two studies, one from [Harvard](#) and another from [MIT](#), found that discounted fare programs for low-income individuals resulted in more trips taken, particularly to health care and social services, and that these programs were the single biggest factor in the odds of escaping poverty and avoiding homelessness.
- A report by the [Kresge Foundation](#) found that addressing transportation barriers for low-income students and students of color enrolled in two- and four-year colleges and universities “can also be a solution to address equity in college completion.”
- A student transit pass pilot program implemented by the [Alameda County Transportation Commission](#) found that, in its first year, 14% of students reported missing fewer days of school than they did during the prior year, and involvement in non-school-based afterschool activities and after-school jobs increased dramatically (by 77% and 238% respectively) for student participants.
- A [study by the LA County Department of Public Health](#) found that securing free transit passes for all students from preschool to college could lead to 1) families saving \$750,000 per year in fines for fare evasion and \$2.5 million per year on student transit passes; 2) students receiving more instructional time; 3) schools receiving an additional \$125,000 each year for every 1% decrease in unexcused absences, and 4) fewer vehicle emissions resulting in healthier families and communities. This study was the foundation for LA Metro’s recently launched GoPass program for all K-14 students in LA County.

The time for further study is over and the time to act is now because we have an urgent need to address out-of-control transportation emissions and the resources to do it. AB 1919 is a cost-effective public policy that expands access to fare-free transportation for our youth because it will reduce current transportation inequities affecting millions of Californians. As public transit fares have risen statewide so too have the socioeconomic barriers to reliable transportation for Californians. In turn, this is affecting Californians’ capacity to work, go to school, and live in a way that is both economically and socially uplifting.

AB 1919 will provide access to quality public transit options during school-age years and increase the likelihood that youth will develop lifelong ridership habits which, in turn, help reduce the GHG

emissions that result from driving personal vehicles in the short and long-term. This bill would also help to facilitate improvements to our state's transit systems with inclusivity and equity at its core.

Thank you for authoring this important legislation that will create a statewide transit pass program for California's hard-working youth and serve as a tool for fighting climate change with equity in mind.

Sincerely,

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Move LA Executive Director

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Youth for Climate Justice

Melissa Romero
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California Environmental Voters (formerly
CLCV)

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