

Good Morning Ladies and Gentlemen,

My name is Austreeia Everson. I am a Marine who has served my country. I continue to serve my community as a Community Outreach Coordinator for Burten Bell Carr (BBC) Development, which is a Community Development Corporation that empowers and revitalizes blighted communities. Our efforts are focused on servicing the Central/Kinsman/Buckeye Communities. Our service areas are located in Ward 5 & 6, which consists of the highest concentrated poverty population in all of Cuyahoga County.

I am here this morning to first provide some insight on the importance of expanding the transportation budget but also provide you a snapshot of the barriers that so many of the residents I serve face everyday just to do basic things that many of us take for granted and under value our privilege of private transportation.

I would like to open up with a story of a young woman that I worked with during my time at Rainbow Terrace, Ms. Allen was a young mother of four children all under the age of 10. She wanted to create a better life for her family so she enrolled in the Tri-C Adult Diploma Program to obtain her high school diploma and certification in 911 dispatch. The 911 dispatch class was only offered at the Tri-C West campus and in order to complete the program she had to start her journey at 230pm to catch multiple buses so that she could arrive 10 minutes before class started at 5pm and then had to make the decision between missing the last 20 min of class to catch the 9pm bus back or wait till the 945pm bus that left her arriving home after midnight. This was her schedule 4 days a week, which left very little time for her to spend with her children and this is just one example of the countless stories of people trying to get to school or work to make a better way. Through my position as a social worker in Kinsman, I developed a community case management program in one of the privately owned affordable housing facilities.

Currently, I serve as the community outreach coordinator with BBC, where I have gained a deep perspective on the barriers that impact our residents chances for mobility out of poverty. The number one request from residents is assistance in finding employment and following that was their struggle with transportation to get to the jobs/trainings. Most jobs that will pay a living wage for entry level or limited skills are in the suburbs such as Solon, Twinsburg, and Hudson. Unfortunately, a resident that lives in the Central community will have to ride the bus for over two and a half hours to get to work on the bus. Depending on the shift you're hired to work, which is usually third, there are limited options to ride the bus and show up to work on time.

A perfect example of this occurrence is Swagelok Company, in Solon, needs to hire over 800 employees within the next four months. Over 300 of those jobs are entry level and limited training or experience needed positions, (Swagelok is only one out of the 40 businesses that are actively searching and hiring staff in the Solon Area). Transportation is one of the greatest barriers to connect residents to those jobs. In addition to this shortcoming, the travelling time to get to their destination, the shortened scheduled routes available and the cost of fares have to be considered before they receive their first paycheck and even after. Before I can attempt to address these issue concerns, there is a funding issue that leaves Regional Transit Authority

unable to support and establish new direct routes from the city to the aforementioned employment destination. The increase of transportation funding would increase the workforce, reduce poverty, and create opportunities for oppressed communities to live the American Dream of mobility. This expansion will also increase access to transportation that will address various safety concerns.

A tragic example is the story of Jasmine Trotter, a 20 year old female who was walking down E.93rd at 4am to the temp agency that was 2.5 miles away to get on the shuttle they provided to her job in Solon, she got up every morning in the dark to provide a living for her and her 4 year old child, but one early March morning she was abducted and murdered on her way to the temp agency. If the fares were more affordable and if there would have been a bus stop near her home that would have been able to take her to an inner city hub that provided that direct shuttle to Solon, she may still be alive today, raising her son.

Access to Transportation is also a barrier for parents with youth in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. CMSD has an open enrollment process, which means that your child could be placed in a school outside of your neighborhood where transportation is not provided, and bus passes are not issued to all students and their parents. Currently the school district has an initiative for school attendance, parent engagement and pre k registration which are needed, but cannot make an impact without transportation funding. An example would be a student that lives outside of the walkable or school bus distance, having to ride the bus at a cost of \$1.75 per ride or \$4.50 per day. If the child is too young to ride alone, then a parent must purchase a day pass at \$5.50 in addition to an accompanied minor fee of \$2.75 per day, so in total a parent is spending \$8.25 per day, or \$165 per month just to take their child to school. That is a barrier for so many families in Cleveland that have limited resources or support. The average resident living in HUD private/public housing in Kinsman/Central makes \$5,000 per year, however, many families make less or have zero income. This barrier of transportation impacts every aspect of the revitalization of the communities we serve from youth opportunities, parent engagement, pre-k attendance because CMSD does not provide any forms of transportation, education/job training opportunities, and especially employment.

A perfect example of the importance for accessibility, is the story of Alianna Defreeze, a 14 year old girl with developmental disabilities that went missing on her way to school on E. 93rd street. Her only option to get to and from school everyday was taking the RTA by herself early in the morning while it is still dark. With an increase in budget RTA would be able to provide an increase in routes, safer shelters for young riders and a continuous route to get students right in front of their schools.

At the end of the day we need to realize that the bottom line is not the only priority but that these are people, people who want to provide a better life, people who struggle doing the basics like take your child to school or to the doctor, people that need us to remember that they matter and understand that we have the privilege to just jump in our cars and go. But please take a moment and try to imagine your current life but exclude the use of a private vehicle. How hard would it be to get to the grocery store, to work, to your kids school activities, to doctors'

appointments and more. The need for increase in budget to support more direct routes to employment destinations and increase frequency of many routes is overwhelming and life changing for the population that we serve that solely rely on RTA as their primary means of transportation.