

Boston Carmen's Union

Testimony

The COVID-19 pandemic has altered the lives of millions of people around the world. Many employees have lost their jobs as businesses shuttered. Many employees are fortunate because their businesses can continue and they can work from home. For essential, frontline employees the pandemic means something different—these workers report to work each day with a new-found fear and anxiety of contracting a disease that could make them or a family member sick, or worse.

Boston Carmen's Union's 4,200 members are among the more than 6,000 MBTA employees currently reporting for work, doing their jobs, and putting their health and safety at risk as well as the health and safety of their families. They are essential employees and because of their commitment *other* essential employees – like healthcare providers – are getting to work, too.

Bus, trolley, and train operators are exposed every day to hundreds of people, often with little or no barrier between them and the passengers they are transporting. Many of these passengers are working in jobs that put them at high risk for exposure, as well. Gloves, masks, and sanitizer are not in abundant supply and some workers are going without - yet they keep coming to work and doing their jobs. This means that every cough, sneeze, or even pleasant greeting exposes them to a risk of contracting COVID-19 and there is little they can do about it.

As of April 6, 35 MBTA employees currently have COVID-19, 2 have recovered, and one man has lost his life. And we know that despite the safety precautions being put in place these numbers will only continue to increase. New York's MTA has already lost more than 20 employees to the pandemic.

Our members have spent years exposed to diesel fumes and infectious agents and are subject to unsafe air quality caused by inadequate air filters and ventilation systems. As a result, many employees already suffer from health ailments and respiratory problems putting them in high-risk categories-- but they show up each day because they take their responsibilities seriously.

MBTA employees are often overlooked when it comes to classifications as frontline employees. But in the COVID-19 battle we are all facing, they are right there at the front of it. Our members must be included in this Bill to ensure that they are given equitable treatment for their service during this time of crisis-- just like police, fire personnel, correction officers, dispatchers, emergency medical technicians, paramedics, nursing professionals and first responders.

If these men and women contract coronavirus and have to be out of work as a result, they should not be penalized by requiring them to use of their own sick, personal, and vacation time-- and they certainly should not have to "borrow" from their future earned sick-time from the MBTA as is currently proposed by management. If an MBTA employee who is reporting to work each day contracts the virus, it should be presumed to be work related. Providing them with the recognition of 'Emergency Hazard Health Duty' ensures they can take the time they need to recover and know that the Commonwealth supports them and thanks them for their commitment.

Jim Evers, President, Boston Carmen's Union