

The Honorable Bill de Blasio
New York City Hall
New York, NY 10007

October 19, 2016

Dear Mayor de Blasio:

We, the undersigned elected officials, labor groups, transit advocates, legal services providers and community organizations, write to express our support for Fair Fares, a proposal introduced by the Community Service Society of New York (CSS) and the Riders Alliance that would make public transit affordable for hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers struggling to get ahead.

Upward mobility, made possible by commuting to good jobs and higher educational opportunities throughout our city, requires actual physical mobility. But that is becoming out of reach for one out of four low-income working-age New Yorkers who according to survey research often cannot afford bus and subway fares. With the price of a MetroCard set to go up again in 2017, the time is now to take measures to make transit affordable for all New Yorkers.

We urge you to include funding in your Fiscal Year 2018 Executive Budget to cover the cost of offering half-price MetroCards to New Yorkers between the ages of 18 and 64 living in households at or below poverty.

According to a 2016 report by CSS, *The Transit Affordability Crisis*, as many as 800,000 New Yorkers would be eligible for reduced fares under this proposal. Participating New Yorkers could save up to \$700 a year on transit costs—money that would be spent in their local communities on food, rent, and other necessities.

We can accomplish this goal in a cost-effective way without putting additional upward pressure on MTA fares. Preliminary estimates from *The Transit Affordability Crisis* find that under this half-fare proposal, the City would have to make up about \$200 million in lost fare revenue annually to the MTA. That is a reasonable price to pay to keep the trains and buses accessible for every New Yorker who must depend on mass transit to get to work and job interviews, attend college and job training programs, obtain needed health care, and enable their families to take advantage of the richness of the city's cultural life. The economic benefits of Fair Fares would help bridge the growing economic gap between the wealthy and the poor, promote a fairer public transit system, and build a more progressive city.

The status quo is failing poor New Yorkers, 58 percent of whom are reliant on subways and buses to survive in the city. Transit expenses often eat up over 10 percent of family budgets for the working poor. With no other options, riders are forced to make difficult choices: a third of low-income New Yorkers, including 43 percent of low-income working-age Latinos, report that the cost of transit fares prevented them from looking for or taking a job further from home. Many find it difficult to get to the doctor. And some are even forced to beg for swipes or risk arrest for lack of \$2.75.

We know how important it is to get on the subway and bus. That's why we already help many New Yorkers pay for their MetroCards. Students receive a free limited-use discount through the Department of Education. Seniors and people with disabilities qualify for a half-price MetroCard,

Continued over

regardless of income. And thanks to the City's new Commuter Benefits law, hundreds of thousands of middle class New Yorkers can reap significant tax savings.

Isn't it time that we help low-income New Yorkers get ahead? Cities like San Francisco and Seattle have already adopted low-income reduced fare programs. But New York is the most transit-dependent city in the nation, and adoption here would be transformative. New York City should lead the way in ensuring that turnstiles are the entry-point, not the barrier, to economic opportunity.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,

Organizations

Community Service Society of New York
The Riders Alliance
Association of Community Employment - Programs for the Homeless (ACE)
Bronx Defenders
Brooklyn Defender Services
Brooklyn Movement Center
CASA
Community Voices Heard
Emergency Rent Coalition
Fifth Avenue Committee
Fiscal Policy Institute
Jews for Racial & Economic Justice
LatinoJustice PRLDEF
Make the Road-NY
NYC-EJA
Opportunities for a Better Tomorrow
Police Reform Organizing Project (PROP)
Pratt Center
Restaurant Opportunities Center of New York (ROC-NY)
NYPIRG's Straphangers Campaign
Transportation Alternatives
TWU
VOCAL-NY
The West Side Commons
Women's City Club of New York
Working Families

Elected Officials

Letitia James, Public Advocate
Scott Stringer, New York City Comptroller

New York City Council Members

Inez Barron
Margaret Chin
Costa Constantinides
Elizabeth Crowley
Laurie Cumbo
Rafael Espinal
Vincent Gentile
Vanessa L. Gibson
Barry Grodenchik
Corey Johnson
Rory Lancman
Brad Lander
Stephen Levin
Mark Levine
Ben Kallos
Karen Koslowitz
Carlos Menchaca
Annabel Palma
Antonio Reynoso
Donovan Richards
Ydanis Rodriguez
Helen Rosenthal
Rafael Salamanca
Ritchie Torres
James Vacca
Jimmy Van Bramer
Jumaane D. Williams