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May 14, 2019

Honorable Corey Johnson  
Speaker  
New York City Council  
250 Broadway, Suite 1856  
New York, New York 10007

Dear Speaker Johnson:

I am writing to stress the importance of expanding the “Fair Fares” program in the FY 2020 City budget to include Access-A-Ride (AAR), a vital transportation link for our population living with disabilities.

The Fair Fares program provides invaluable assistance to eligible New Yorkers struggling to make ends meet, and the same assistance should be provided to low-income community members who rely on AAR.

A reliable and affordable mode of transportation is key for employment, and by not providing low-income community members with disabilities an affordable option to get to their workplace, New York City is not giving them every opportunity they deserve to rise above poverty. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, approximately 20 percent of people with disabilities are employed. AAR can also provide much needed transportation for medical appointments, social events and other everyday interactions many of us take for granted.

Additionally, AAR users are unable to use MetroCards to pay for AAR, which further denies them the ability to access a discount to achieve parity with subway users who get access to fair fares.

People living with disabilities are particularly more vulnerable to poverty and unemployment, with 35 percent of this population living below the federal poverty level. Black and Latino populations with disabilities have even higher levels of poverty, with 38.1 percent and 45.9 percent living below the federal poverty level, respectively, according to New York Lawyers for the Public Interest. All of this underscores why the financial benefits of Fair Fares must be expanded to include AAR.

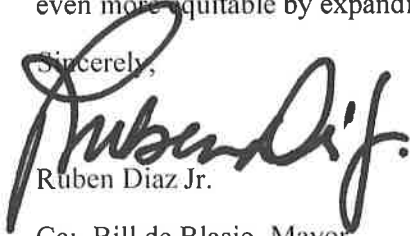
AAR currently has approximately 150,000 users and an average of approximately 625,000 total trips taken per month. The total revenue of AAR is approximately \$23 million, according to the Metropolitan Transportation Authority. Reducing this total would be a small price to pay for invaluable assistance with employment, medical appointments and living a social life for New York City’s residents with disabilities.

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I urge you to consider the needs of low-income people with disabilities and make changes so that our community members can have access to more affordable transportation.

The New York City Council must resolve the disconnect between the discount Access-A-Ride users should be eligible for and the current reality which does not afford it to them. The Council must make Fair Fares even more equitable by expanding the program to include Access-A-Ride users in the FY 2020 budget.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ruben Diaz Jr.", written over the word "Sincerely,".

Ruben Diaz Jr.

Cc: Bill de Blasio, Mayor

Steven Banks, Commissioner, HRA