

Testimony: Representative Lateefah Simon (CA-12)

T&I Member Day Hearing

January 14, 2026

Thank you, Chair Graves, Ranking Member Larsen, and members of this Committee, for the opportunity to testify today. Six months ago, I shared with you my experiences as a transit-dependent woman, and how they shaped my commitment to safe, accessible, and affordable public transit. For millions of Americans, transit is not optional. It is how we get to work, to school, to medical care, and back home again.

Those trips shaped my life, and they are why I care so deeply about making transit safe and reliable for every rider. During my time serving on the Board of the Bay Area Rapid Transit, rider and operator safety was always a top priority. It was this focus on safety that led me to champion the first-in-the-nation Transit Ambassador program, providing a visible, unarmed worker presence to deter low-level incidents and de-escalate situations. Transit Ambassadors are a cost-effective way to protect operators, reduce violence, and build rider confidence without over-policing. The results speak for themselves: last year, crime on BART dropped 17 percent, violent crime dropped 23 percent, even while ridership increased by 2.6 million trips.

Last spring, I rode from the 19th Street station to the Fruitvale station in my Congressional District to see Ambassadors in action. Riders told me they feel safer because they see someone who can help, not just arrest. That's why I recently introduced the Rapid Intervention and Deterrence for Enhanced Rider, or "RIDER," Safety Act. This bill would help transit agencies nationwide establish similar Ambassador programs. To be clear, Ambassadors do not replace transit police. They work alongside sworn officers. But staffing shortages mean officers cannot always respond quickly to non-emergency threats. Without dedicated engagement roles, minor issues can escalate, putting riders and operators at risk. I am proud this legislation has the support of unions and transit operators alike, and I urge this Committee to include H.R. 6069, the RIDER Safety Act in the upcoming Surface Transportation Reauthorization.

Another priority I would like to address is affordability. Affordable housing and public transit are deeply connected. BART's transit-oriented development program has provided relief for low-income families, delivering more than 4,000 housing units, including affordable units, across 15 stations. These projects don't just create homes; they drive local economic growth. Every 100 units built on BART property generate roughly 450 direct and indirect jobs. For working families, living near transit isn't a luxury. It means access to jobs, schools, healthcare, and opportunity. When we put homes near transit, we reduce emissions and connect families to the future they deserve.

Finally, accessible transit is critical. Today, individuals with disabilities have very limited flexibility when requesting paratransit services. That lack of flexibility limits independence and opportunity. I want to work with this Committee to ensure same-day paratransit services are

supported. I'll close with this: mobility is a human right. It's how we get to work, to school, to medical appointments, and to each other. I was sent to Congress to fight for working families, and that fight starts with making sure they can get where they need to go safely, affordably, and reliably.

Thank you, and I yield back.

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