



Testimony of Alain Xiong-Calmes  
Director of State and Local Government Relations, Northeast US  
Chamber of Progress  
Re: HB 1447

**March 6, 2024**

**Re: OPPOSE House Bill 1447: Autonomous Vehicles**

Dear Chair Korman and members of the committee,

On behalf of Chamber of Progress, a tech industry coalition promoting technology's progressive future, I write to urge you to **oppose HB 1447**.

We are strong supporters of autonomous vehicles because of their potential to save hundreds of thousands of lives and benefit our communities – promoting sustainability, mitigating transit and food accessibility gaps, and increasing mobility for the elderly and disabled.

**Autonomous vehicles will bring safer streets and reduce the number of accidents.** The National Highway Traffic Safety Association (NHTSA) released crash data reporting nearly 43,000 lives were lost in traffic-related fatalities in 2022.<sup>1</sup> Between 2019 and 2021, traffic deaths and fatalities in the United States rose by 17.5 percent - the largest two-year increase since World War II.<sup>2</sup> In 2023 alone, there were 600 traffic fatalities in Maryland, a 6% increase from the previous year. More than a third of those fatal crashes involved distracted driving.<sup>3</sup>

Distracted driving, drunk and impaired driving, speeding, and failing to wear a seatbelt remain the leading causes of death on American roads.<sup>4</sup> But AVs never

<sup>1</sup><https://www.nhtsa.gov/press-releases/traffic-crash-death-estimates-2022#:~:text=The%20National%20Highway%20Traffic%20Safety,42%2C939%20fatalities%20reported%20for%202021>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/15/briefing/vehicle-crashes-deaths-pandemic.html>

<sup>3</sup><https://www.wusa9.com/article/news/local/maryland/600-deaths-maryland-roads-2023/65-b30b0933-a6e7-43ad-85fb-90314cf71e36>

<sup>4</sup> <https://madd.org/press-release/epidemic-plaguing-americas-roads-reaches-historic-levels/c>

drive distracted, drunk, or fatigued. And their safety record is impeccable. In fact, a recently published study found that autonomous ridesharing services in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Phoenix experienced 57% fewer police-reported crashes and 85% fewer crashes involving injuries compared to human drivers.<sup>5</sup>

**Autonomous vehicles promote sustainability efforts.** Through high-speed driving, braking, and re-acceleration, humans burn a lot of gas and energy while driving.<sup>6</sup> According to the Southwest Research Institute, through connectivity and automation, AVs can reach 20% improvement in fuel efficiency.<sup>7</sup> Since AVs are programmed to follow traffic rules and speed limits, they will ultimately burn less gas and energy. Deploying autonomous vehicles can help Maryland reach its goal of achieving 50% renewable energy by 2030.<sup>8</sup>

**Autonomous vehicles are also popular with voters.** A survey commissioned by Chamber of Progress found that 53% of voters are ready to ride in an AV now or in the next five years, and the same number supported the testing and deployment of AVs in their state.<sup>9</sup> Union members also overwhelmingly support the deployment of AVs, with 75% of respondents saying they supported testing AVs in their state. In San Francisco, in the month after they were opened to the public, autonomous rideshare services logged over 36,000 paid trips.<sup>10</sup> Voters and consumers are excited about the possibilities of autonomous vehicles.

**HB 1447 would deny these benefits to Maryland residents.** By requiring a licensed driver to be in the front seat during all trips, HB 1447 ignores the safety record of autonomous vehicles and the rigorous testing this technology must go through before being deployed on public roads. AV operators must demonstrate to state and federal agencies that their vehicles meet safety standards.<sup>11</sup>

Before deploying in a new city, AV operators also meticulously test their technology on closed courses and map the streets in detail to ensure the vehicles respond correctly to real-time road conditions. Banning the commercial use of

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<sup>5</sup><https://waymo.com/blog/2023/12/waymo-significantly-outperforms-comparable-human-benchmarks-over-7-million/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://greenerideal.com/news/vehicles/driverless-cars-environmental-benefits/>

<sup>7</sup><https://www.swri.org/press-release/vehicle-fuel-efficiency-improvement-connectivity-automation-arpa-e-nextcar>

<sup>8</sup> <https://cleanchoiceenergy.com/news/renewable-energy-in-maryland>

<sup>9</sup><https://progresschamber.org/morning-consult-poll-dems-biden-voters-union-members-support-autonomous-vehicles/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.sfchronicle.com/sf/article/cruise-waymo-san-francisco-18472568.php>

<sup>11</sup><https://www.nhtsa.gov/sites/nhtsa.gov/files/2022-03/Final-Rule-Occupant-Protection-Amendment-Automated-Vehicles.pdf>

these vehicles on highways, even after they have demonstrated their safety through these tests, is unnecessary and would block the deployment of life-saving technology.

To increase transportation options, promote sustainable transportation, and make Maryland roads safer, **I urge you to oppose this bill.**

Thank you,

Alain Xiong-Calmes

Director of State and Local Government Relations, Northeast US