

Environment and Transportation Committee

Chair, Delegate Marc Korman

Vice Chair, Delegate Regina T. Boyce

Thursday, February 8, 2024

Written Testimony for Uber Technologies, Inc. on HB 148

Human trafficking is a violation of human rights that affects 50 million people around the world, with one in 3 victims being children. Maryland of course is not immune from this problem. Since 2007, the National Human Trafficking Hotline has identified 1,533 cases of human trafficking in Maryland, with nearly 3,000 victims. Awareness is an important component to fighting human trafficking.

Uber recognizes that as a technology company engaged in the transportation system, our company is in a powerful position to raise awareness around human trafficking and, with the state's help, make an impact.

Uber is already a national leader in this space. We have partnered with leading organizations like Polaris and ECPAT-USA to advocate for change and increase awareness about the signs of human trafficking for drivers who use the Uber platform. Thus, Uber is supportive of this effort to increase awareness of human trafficking among drivers active on the Uber platform in Maryland. We would, however, suggest some minor adjustments to the legislation to ensure that the requirement is appropriately tailored to the needs of drivers on Uber's platform.

First, and foremost, Uber would like to have the option to continue to offer our current human trafficking education to drivers. These materials are uniquely tailored to our industry and were developed closely with experts at Polaris, a nationally recognized human trafficking prevention organization. Allowing Uber to offer this education will help ensure that we can tailor the materials for rideshare drivers and adjust as needed. Moreover, Uber's current educational video meets the requirements currently outlined in HB148.

Second, we want to help ensure we are balancing the ability of drivers to get on the road with safety. Maryland is the only state in the country that requires individual licenses for rideshare drivers. As currently drafted, the bill would require that drivers complete the training before they take a first trip. This step is likely to add additional complexity to an already complex process - and will put another barrier in place which will make it difficult for drivers to earn. It also threatens to upend the hard work of the Maryland Public Service Commission, who processes TNO licenses in the state.

Thus, we suggest allowing drivers to obtain provisional licensure prior to completing the training, while requiring that they complete the training within 90 days of taking a trip. This will help balance safety, with the needs of drivers who rely on the Uber platform to earn.

Finally, we ask that the Committee modify the bill's language to clarify that certain individuals, including Transportation Network Operators are not employees. Currently, the legislation outlines certain training and certification requirements for employers. Nonetheless, groups such as TNOs and even independently-owned taxis in the state do not fall under this category. We recommend placing clarifying language in the bill about the requirements of these individuals.