

Sherry Shirek

101 East Wells Street, #A502

Baltimore, MD 21230

February 27, 2025

Maryland General Assembly

Dear Chairman Korman, Vice Chair Boyce, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Sherry Shirek, and I am a blind resident of Baltimore, Maryland. Once an independent driver, I now rely on a guide dog for mobility. Currently awaiting my next guide dog, I am also optimistic about the future of autonomous vehicles (AVs). I fully support HB1256.

Living in Baltimore, I face significant challenges with unreliable public transportation. Consequently, I depend on services like Uber and Lyft, where drivers often discriminate based on disability or the presence of my service dog. When seeking transportation to work or medical appointments, the uncertainty of a driver denying me a ride causes considerable stress and anxiety. Drivers have refused service, citing fears of dogs, concerns about dog hair, allergies, or simply stating they do not accept dogs, despite my calm explanation that I am blind and my dog is a trained service animal. Often, I must attempt to convince the driver of their contractual obligation to accept service dogs or explain the relevant laws, leading to arguments or the driver driving away. The availability of an autonomous vehicle as an option would be ideal.

Additionally, as a kidney transplant recipient on immunosuppressive medication, I am at increased risk of contracting contagious illnesses. AVs could provide a safer alternative by removing the potential risks posed by human drivers. Furthermore, AVs would eliminate the issue of drivers refusing to transport me simply because I have a guide dog.

I am also highly sensitive to smells, and many drivers use air fresheners, cologne, or even smoke cigarettes or cannabis. These odors can make me very ill and sometimes cause me to vomit. As a result, I carry a large plastic bag and extra paper towels during my travels, prepared for any unpleasant scents that may arise. Autonomous vehicles would help eliminate these challenges, allowing me to travel with greater ease and comfort.

AVs hold the potential to improve my daily life by eliminating the numerous barriers I face while living with a disability. I urge you to support HB1256.

Sincerely,