



February 6, 2025

The Honorable Marc Korman  
Chair, Committee on Environment and Transportation  
Room 205, House Office Building  
6 Bladen St.  
Annapolis, MD 21401

**Re: Please oppose HB 439 and support AV opportunity in Maryland**

Dear Chair Korman and members of the committee,

On behalf of Chamber of Progress – a tech industry association supporting public policies to build a more inclusive society in which all people benefit from technological advancements – I write in respectful **opposition to HB 439**, which would effectively ban the use of autonomous trucks in Maryland.

Across the country, the trucking industry has experienced extreme turnover and widespread job vacancies, resulting in significant delays to product shipments and rising prices for basic necessities. Though exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, retention has been an issue in trucking for decades. The American Trucking Association reports an annual turnover rate of 90 percent and projects that the nationwide shortage of truckers will double to over 160,000 job vacancies by 2030.<sup>1</sup> Autonomous vehicles offer a solution to help fill the gap left by a strained labor market and high demand for timely shipping.

The crisis facing the trucking industry hasn't just resulted in delayed shipments, but also in higher prices for consumers. To attract and retain drivers, trucking companies have raced to offer increased pay and larger bonuses.<sup>2</sup> The combination of growing labor expenses and rising fuel costs has resulted in a spike in the cost of shipping and a corresponding rise in the price of consumer goods.<sup>3</sup> Those price increases hit

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<sup>1</sup> Michelle Fleury, *How will the US deal with a shortage of 80,000 truckers?*, BBC News (Dec. 2021).

<https://www.bbc.com/news/business-59136957>

<sup>2</sup> Don Lee, *Facing record labor shortages, trucking firms battle fiercely for drivers*, LA Times, (Dec. 2021)

<https://www.latimes.com/politics/story/2021-12-07/facing-record-labor-shortages-trucking-firms-battle-fiercely-for-drivers>

<sup>3</sup> Alex Longley, Catherine Bosley, and Deirdre Hipwell, *Out-of-Control Shipping Costs Fire Up Prices From Coffee to Toys*, Bloomberg Business (Dec. 2021).

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-06-12/out-of-control-shipping-costs-fire-up-prices-from-coffee-to-toys>

low-income families the hardest, with the cost of some everyday groceries increasing by as much as 50 percent.<sup>4</sup>

Autonomous, driverless trucks can mitigate these costs by filling driver vacancies and eliminating the need for excessive recruitment, retention, and other overhead costs, ultimately bringing down the price of shipping and consumer goods. Banning the use of this technology would exacerbate existing supply chain struggles and unnecessarily eliminate a tool to bring costs down for families.

Recent polling shows **overwhelming support for autonomous vehicle (AV) testing and deployment among Democratic voters and union members.**<sup>5</sup> A survey conducted by Morning Consult found that a majority of adults support AVs being tested in their state. For Democrats and union members, support was even higher; 60 percent of Democratic voters and 75 percent of labor union members support AV testing in their state.

**Autonomous trucks can also reduce long-term environmental costs from pollution.**

While trucks represent only 6% of vehicles on the road, they produce over 35% of transportation-generated nitrous oxide and 25% of on-road greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>6</sup> Since autonomous vehicles can be programmed to optimize their routes and follow traffic rules and speeds, autonomous trucks will ultimately use energy more efficiently. This technology could be instrumental in achieving Maryland's emission goals of a 60% reduction in emissions by 2031 and net-zero emissions by 2045.<sup>7</sup>

Two dozen other states have already approved the use of autonomous trucks, including Nevada, Arizona, and Texas.<sup>8</sup> Testing has already begun across the Sunbelt, giving the region a head start at unlocking the economic and environmental benefits.<sup>9</sup> The proposed bill would cut off Maryland from emerging trade routes. As a result, residents would lose out on faster access to goods and businesses would face less stable supply chains compared to those in neighboring states. Banning the use of autonomous trucks at this stage risks cutting Maryland off from future economic development.

Mandating a human driver for autonomous trucking is a step backward, hindering the progress of a technology that has the potential to revolutionize transportation. **Requiring**

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<sup>4</sup> Nelson D. Schwartz and Coral Murphy Marcos, *Higher Food Prices Hit the Poor and Those Who Help Them*, NY Times (Dec. 2021). <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/27/business/economy/food-prices-us.html>

<sup>5</sup> Morning Consult Survey, Chamber of Progress (Sept. 2021).  
<http://progresschamber.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Morning-Consult-AV-survey.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> California moves to phase-out diesel-powered trucks, cut locomotive pollution, Reuters (2023)  
<https://www.reuters.com/business/sustainable-business/california-moves-phase-out-diesel-powered-trucks-cut-locomotive-pollution-2023-04-28/>

<sup>7</sup> Priority Climate Action Plan State of Maryland. Maryland Department of the Environment. (Mar. 2024).  
<https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2024-03/mde-state-of-maryland-cprg-priority-climate-action-plan.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Trisha Thadani, *Ready or not, self-driving trucks are coming to America's highways*, Washington Post (Mar. 2024).  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2024/03/31/autonomous-semi-truck-jobs-regulation/>

<sup>9</sup> Seth Clevenger, *Autonomous Trucks Reshaping the Freight Industry*, Transport Topics News (Jan. 2024).  
<https://www.ttnews.com/articles/autonomous-trucks-reshaping-freight-industry>

**a human driver undermines the efficiency and safety advantages of AVs, while increasing operational costs and limiting their widespread deployment.** HB 439 would effectively stall the deployment of a technology designed to improve fuel efficiency, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and strengthen supply chain resiliency causing Maryland to miss out on its full benefits.

For these reasons, **we urge you to oppose HB 439.**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "B. January". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Brianna" and the last name "January" written in a connected style.

Brianna January

Director of State & Local Government Relations, Northeast US