February 25, 2025

Delegate Marc Korman
Chair, Environment and Transportation Committee
250 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Chair Korman and Members of the Committee,

The Autonomous Vehicle Industry Association ("AVIA") writes to express strong support for HB 1256, which would expressly enable the safe operation of autonomous vehicles ("AVs") in Maryland and bring the numerous safety, workforce, and economic benefits of AVs to the state. Passing this bill will allow Maryland to join the majority of states that have similarly recognized the significant benefits of AVs by enacting legislation expressly enabling driverless AV operation.

By way of background, AVIA is comprised of the world's leading technology, ridesharing, trucking, and automotive companies. Our mission is to realize the benefits of autonomous vehicles (i.e., SAE Levels 4 and 5-capable vehicles) and support the safe and expeditious deployment of these technologies. Vehicles operated by AVIA members have driven more than 70 million autonomous miles on public roads in the U.S. alone and have a tremendous safety record that is supported by data collected by the federal government.

As recognized by this bill, AVs have incredible safety, mobility, and efficiency benefits, and the ongoing deployment of AVs is demonstrating how AVs will save lives and change the way we move. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration ("NHTSA") estimates that over 40,000 traffic deaths occurred in 2023, which is roughly equivalent to a plane crash *every day* in our country. Maryland alone saw over 600 traffic fatalities in 2023. These fatality numbers reveal a pattern of increasingly unsafe driving that is occurring in Maryland and across the country, and they reflect an unacceptable status quo when it comes to safety on our roadways.

Human behavior is a contributing factor to the overwhelming majority of crashes. AVs are well positioned to combat the trend of unsafe driving that has persisted for years on U.S. roads because they have unparalleled visibility of the world around them as a result of advanced technologies that work in concert to form the automated driving system, which is the "brain" that drives the vehicle. The combination of these systems leads to quicker decisions with many more inputs than a human driver. AVs also have a 360-degree field of vision which can detect, track, and react to objects and people even when they are hidden from human perception due to vehicles, buildings, and other obstructions. Importantly, unlike human drivers, AVs do not drive drunk, text while driving, fall asleep at the wheel, or recklessly speed.

Moreover, AVs have built a significant safety record through more than a dozen years of development and deployment, and AVs are safely operating without a human driver in states across the country. This safety record is supported by data collected by the federal government, which requires AV companies to report incidents—no matter how minor or who caused the incident—that occur while an automated driving system is engaged. Furthermore, as the industry reaches miles-driven milestones, companies are releasing compelling safety studies to show how the vehicles are making roads safer.

In addition to enhancing safety, the enactment of HB 1256 will create new jobs for Maryland workers. The AV industry is currently leveraging the existing workforce to create new roles for different education and skill levels. Many of the jobs created will not require a college degree, such as service technicians, remote assistance operators, mapping data collectors, delivery packers, and many others to support AV operations. Workers with experience in the trucking industry specifically, particularly as truck drivers, offer valuable skills to AV trucking employers. Make no mistake: America's truck drivers and autonomous trucks will coexist and thrive together in the future. Federal government data shows our country must move 50% more freight by 2050. Unfortunately, the U.S. trucking industry is currently short of an estimated 78,000 truck drivers, and this shortage is estimated to double by 2031. Maryland must find ways to move *more* freight with *fewer* truck drivers to do it. We believe autonomous trucks are one part of the suite of solutions and that autonomous trucks will augment the important work that truck drivers do for our country.

In addition to offering these safety and workforce benefits, AVs are also well positioned to help reduce traffic congestion, improve environmental quality, and advance transportation efficiency. In particular, autonomous heavy-duty vehicles that operate in interstate commerce will increase the safety and efficiency of freight movement. According to a study funded by the U.S. Department of Transportation and Federal Highway Administration, automating long-haul trucking will spur $111 billion in aggregate investment spending across the U.S. economy, increase total U.S. employment by 26,400 to 35,100 jobs per year on average, and raise annual earnings for all U.S. workers by more than $200 per worker per year.

AVs offer great opportunities, but a framework that allows for the driverless deployment of the technology is necessary to realize these benefits. AVIA supports HB 1256 because it would provide such a framework to deploy AVs in Maryland in a safe manner, and it would position Maryland to capitalize on its regulatory leadership in the AV ecosystem while establishing a pro-competitive and level playing field for entities seeking to safely test and deploy AVs in the state.

AUTONOMOUS VEHICLE INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION

AV technology is here today, and if Maryland does not act now, it risks being left behind as the technology continues to be deployed. 25 states have laws that expressly authorize AV deployment, including several states surrounding Maryland. The reality is that AV companies cannot make capital investments in the state unless legislation authorizing AVs is passed. For these reasons, AVIA strongly encourages you to pass HB 1256.

Sincerely,

Jeff Farrah
Chief Executive Officer
Autonomous Vehicle Industry Association