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February 4, 2025

Hon. Delegate Marc Korman, Chair
Hon. Delegate Regina T. Boyce, Vice Chair
Environment and Transportation Committee Room 250/251
Taylor House Office Building Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: HB 439 – Vehicle Laws— Fully Autonomous Vehicles – Human Safety Operators and Reporting Requirements

Hearing Date: February 6, 2025

Position: Oppose

Dear Chairman Korman, Vice Chairman Boyce, and Committee Members:

The Gaithersburg-Germantown Chamber of Commerce was founded in 1949. Since then, the organization has grown to more than 450 members representing over 50,000 area employees, serving the upper I270 corridor from Gaithersburg north to Damascus. On behalf of these members, we appreciate the opportunity to provide written comments on House Bill 439— Vehicle Laws— Fully Autonomous Vehicles – Human Safety Operators and Reporting Requirements.

We oppose this legislation specifically on behalf of one of our members, Forterra (formerly known as Robotic Research/RRAI), a 23-year old native-grown Montgomery County (D15) dual-use technology company delivering offroad (non-highway) ground autonomy capabilities to the US Department of Defense and industrial commercial customers. Forterra employs 300 people at their Clarksburg, Maryland headquarters, including 175 Maryland residents from multiple legislative districts.

HB439 is an attempt to take similar legislation from California, which was vetoed twice by Governor Newsom, and expand it to a more onerous, overly broad reporting mandate, while also restricting critical testing required to deliver a robust, safe product to industrial customers and our military's warfighters. The California legislature's efforts to pass a similar bill has created significant brain drain and economic damage, as several AV companies have already left their state as a result.

HB439 will stifle Maryland innovation and chase long-time Maryland companies like Forterra out of Maryland. This bill is not about safety, it is an attempt to prevent the deployment of technology. This technology is designed to make the industrial economy safer, less cognitively demanding, and improve the efficiency of a critical part of our ability to dominate the global freight economy. This bill will not improve the safety of industrial operations, but will rather stymie innovation and smother economic growth for Maryland companies like Forterra.

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As we all know from the MD Comptroller's 2024 report, Maryland faces many challenges in offering an attractive climate for growing a business, being ranked 31st overall in business competitiveness, with our neighbor Virginia being ranked 1st, and now we are also ranked the 5th worst state to start a business (WalletHub). We absolutely must retain the businesses who have laid roots in Maryland. Additionally, developing, building, and delivering this type of technology in Maryland is exactly the kind of economic growth that Governor Moore has indicated he wants to foster.

This bill hurts economic growth by handicapping Maryland autonomy businesses, like Forterra. The onerous reporting requirements will force companies to either move out of the state, or to do less testing, which increases safety risk. If HB439 passes it may force Forterra to move operations out of the state. We don't want to lose 300 employees in Clarksburg.

We appreciate the opportunity to voice our opposition to this legislation, and we urge an unfavorable vote on HB439.

Sincerely,



Paula Ross

President & CEO

Gaithersburg-Germantown Chamber of Commerce