



January 31, 2025

Delegate Marc Korman
Chair, House Environment and Transportation Committee
251 Taylor House Office Building
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chair Korman and Members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee:

As the President of the National Federation of the Blind, I am writing to express our opposition to House Bill 439 which would unnecessarily hinder the development of fully autonomous technology in Maryland and miss an opportunity for our state to lead in this area.

The National Federation of the Blind is the transformative membership and advocacy organization of blind Americans, led by elected blind leaders, founded in 1940, and headquartered in Baltimore since 1978. We are deeply committed to advancing the rights and independence of blind and low-vision Americans. Accessible transportation is not merely a convenience; it is a fundamental necessity that empowers our community to participate fully in society, access employment opportunities, and engage in daily activities.

Autonomous vehicles empower blind and low-vision individuals to travel fully independently, reducing dependence on others and fostering self-sufficiency. Blind and low-vision Americans deserve equal access to cutting-edge technology, and Maryland is uniquely poised to be able to test the technology for the disability community. The National Federation of the Blind headquarters in Baltimore, Maryland, is dedicated to sharing expertise to make sure that fully autonomous vehicles operating in Maryland would be implementing best practices for nonvisual accessibility through the Center of Excellence in Nonvisual Access, putting Maryland once again front and center in the conversation of cutting-edge developments while ensuring accessibility.

HB 439 would impose significant new restrictions on the AV industry, and we are concerned this will create a chilling effect and prevent the industry from bringing its technology to the state. As someone who demonstrated the first blind-drivable vehicle in 2011 and who has ridden in autonomous vehicles here and in other nations, I believe that the industry is demonstrating commitment to addressing the concerns and needs of the broadest range of people.

In conclusion, we respectfully request that, rather than passing HB 439, the General Assembly pass enabling legislation that would allow for the AV industry to bring their innovative technology

to Maryland and that accessibility be prioritized in that legislation to positively impact the lives of blind and low-vision individuals.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. Should you require additional information or wish to discuss this further, please do not hesitate to reach out to me directly.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark A. Riccobono", with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Mark A. Riccobono, President
National Federation of the Blind