



## Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 949: Vehicle Laws - Fully Autonomous Vehicles

Chair Korman and members of the Environment and Transportation Committee, I am pleased to offer testimony in favor of Senate Bill 949: Vehicle Laws - Fully Autonomous Vehicles, on behalf of the Blinded Veterans Association (BVA).

Since 1945, BVA has been dedicated to empowering blinded veterans to live with dignity and independence, ensuring they take their rightful place in the community. As the only congressionally chartered Veterans Service Organization comprised of and led by visually impaired veterans, we understand firsthand the challenges of navigating life with significant vision loss. Veterans Health Administration data demonstrates the critical need for accessible services for veterans with vision loss. Research shows 130,000 veterans are legally blind, and projections indicate 1.1 million more live with low vision, defined as visual acuity of 20/70 or worse. For veterans experiencing severe vision impairment or blindness, including a significant portion of those returning from recent conflicts, accessible transportation is not merely a convenience but a critical necessity.

S.B. 949, by authorizing the use of fully autonomous vehicles on Maryland roads, directly addresses this critical need. Transportation independence is essential for individuals who are unable to drive, and for blinded veterans, this autonomy is paramount to maintaining their quality of life. BVA strongly advocates for the implementation of autonomous vehicle technology as a safe and sustainable transportation solution, particularly for veterans with vision impairment.

Autonomous vehicles have already proven to be a lifeline for blinded veterans in areas where services like Waymo are operational. This technology provides a level of safe, independent mobility that has been historically unattainable. For the first time, veterans can access transportation without relying on the availability of others. With self-driving vehicle companies providing over 150,000 rides weekly in approved markets, we urge this committee to recognize the transformative potential of this technology and extend these opportunities to the veterans and residents of Maryland.

BVA believes that S.B. 949 represents a significant step towards enhancing the independence and quality of life for blinded veterans and all Maryland residents. We respectfully request a favorable report on this bill.

Sincerely,

Lea Rowe  
National Legislative Director  
Blinded Veterans Association