



8401 Old Courthouse Road
Vienna, VA 22182
TEL 800.872.5827 / 202.776.0406
ucp.org

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Testimony Supporting Senate Bill 949: Vehicle Laws - Fully Autonomous Vehicles

Dear Chairman, Korman, and members of the Environment and Transportation Committee:

I strongly support SB 949, which authorizes autonomous vehicles on Maryland roads. For 75 years, United Cerebral Palsy has served people with cerebral palsy (CP) and a wide range of other neurodevelopmental disabilities, along with their families and communities across the U.S. and Canada. UCP provides services and programs for people with Down Syndrome, autism spectrum disorder, traumatic brain injury (TBI), and other intellectual and developmental disabilities. We provide services and support at a local and regional level while working at a national level to initiate change and advocate for adults and children with disabilities.

Many UCP affiliates offer housing, therapy, family support, employment assistance, early intervention programs, and much more. UCP affiliates rely on people being able to travel to receive the services they need. While many people with disabilities can drive, some are not, and some have days when physical challenges can be wholly debilitating. For the families and caregivers of people with severe disabilities, transportation to and from hospitals and service providers can be a significant burden.

As an organization dedicated to improving the lives of individuals with disabilities, United Cerebral Palsy (UCP) recognizes the significant potential of self-driving vehicles to increase transportation independence. Many people with disabilities face significant challenges accessing reliable and convenient transportation, and autonomous vehicles offer a promising solution.

By removing the requirement for a driver's license, autonomous vehicles decouple the ability to travel independently from the physical ability to drive. This not only expands transportation options but also opens employment opportunities for individuals whose disabilities may prevent them from obtaining a driver's license but who are otherwise qualified for various jobs. Increased access to transportation allows individuals with disabilities to more easily access work, education, medical appointments, and other essential activities, fostering greater inclusion and independence.

I urge you to support SB 949 and help make Maryland a more inclusive and accessible state for all its residents.

Sincerely,

Armando Contreras

Armando Contreras
President and CEO
United Cerebral Palsy