



Live the life you want.

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To: Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

The members of the National Federation of the Blind of Maryland urge the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee to give a favorable report to SB0949. This bill establishes standards for the use of fully autonomous vehicles in Maryland. This bill also ensures that individuals with disabilities are able to use such AVs free from discrimination.

Blind and low-vision Marylanders depend on transportation options including rideshare to move about our communities, attend medical appointments, go to and from work, and so on; we do not drive ourselves, and thus we depend on other means besides our own vehicles. Rideshare is one major method we use to travel. However, we have experienced significant discrimination when using rideshare services where there is a human operator. Our members report regular, sometimes daily, rideshare denials from individual drivers of companies like Uber and Lyft. Though these denials tend to be regular and frequent for guide dog users, they are alarmingly common for those who use a long white cane as well. Inherent in a system that depends on people is a system that is capable of discrimination. AV technology eliminates this discrimination, because an AV doesn't know or care if I have a guide dog or a long white cane, and it won't bring its preconceived notions or incorrect stereotypes when deciding whether or not to leave me standing at the curb, causing me to miss my doctor's appointment or be late to work.

The NFB has been working with the autonomous vehicle industry to ensure that AV technology is nonvisually accessible. Washington, DC, and other nearby jurisdictions have laws and regulations in place that enable their residents to use AV technology, or they are in testing phases meaning this technology will be coming to an end user soon. At present, an individual has to switch vehicles at the state line, but with Maryland, the District, and others being part of a single transportation system and community, this is frankly silly and disruptive. We believe Maryland should have the same access for AV users as nearby jurisdictions.

Some may raise concerns about this technology with regard to safety. The reality is that AV technology is safer than human-operated vehicles, because an autonomous vehicle will not drive drunk, or text while driving, or fall asleep while driving.

A recent media story about an AV that got lost in an airport parking lot discounts that human operators routinely get lost in parking lots, drive the wrong-way on a one-way street, and so on. The benefit of an AV is that the monitors can get it straightened out fairly quickly, whereas human operators will continue to be lost, etc.

For those reasons and others, we ask for a favorable report on SB0949. For questions, please contact me at President@nfbmd.org or at 443-426-4110.