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HB 1295 - Vehicle Laws - Fully Autonomous Vehicles

House Environment and Transportation Committee

March 5, 2026

OPPOSE

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Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in strong opposition to HB 1295.

HB 1295 authorizes fully autonomous vehicles to operate on Maryland highways without a human driver, despite the absence of enforceable safety standards or meaningful oversight of the automated driving systems that would be entrusted with public safety. By allowing these vehicles on the road without proven safeguards, HB 1295 exposes Marylanders to risks that are well-documented and entirely avoidable.

Real-world deployments show that autonomous vehicles are not ready for unsupervised operation. In Austin, Texas, autonomous vehicles were reported to have more than 20 incidents in which they illegally passed school buses with red flashing lights, putting children directly in harm's way.¹ These incidents triggered a company recall of the software. Because these vehicles rely on algorithms or remote human intervention from thousands of miles away, they often struggle in unpredictable, real-world situations. A study by Shengxuan Ding and Mohamed Abdel-Aty from the University of Central Florida found that self-driving cars "had a crash risk five times as great as human drivers at dawn or dusk, and nearly double the accident rate of human drivers when making turns."² These risks are especially concerning in densely populated cities with complex roadways. Much of the research on autonomous vehicles is preliminary, and many experts in the field have called for significantly more studies before concluding that AVs enhance safety. Between 2019 and late 2025, there were 5,202 reported autonomous vehicle crashes in the United States,

¹ "Waymo Issues Recall After Incidents With School Buses." John J. Malm & Associates Personal Injury Lawyers. December 2025.

² "Driverless cars are mostly safer than humans - but worse at turns." New Scientist. Jeremy Hsu. June 2024.



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resulting in 451 injuries or fatalities.³ These numbers reflect a technology that is still experimental.

HB 1295 treats the automated driving system as the “driver,” even though these systems routinely fail to detect human bodies, unusual objects, and other cues that human drivers can interpret. The vision-based software that powers autonomous vehicles often struggles to correctly interpret complex or unusual environments. These systems malfunction in unpredictable ways, requiring human intervention to fix them. However, when no human is behind the wheel, will that intervention come quick enough? This bill also does not require an independent safety certification. Instead, it relies on manufacturer-submitted “first-responder interaction plans,” which, while important, do not substitute for engineering review or mandatory safety testing. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), the federal agency with expertise to regulate vehicle safety, has not established national safety standards for self-driving cars. In the absence of federal standards, Maryland needs to be cautious. HB 1295 does the exact opposite: it preempts local governments and exempts autonomous vehicles from certain equipment laws designed to protect people. We strongly support local governments and municipalities the freedom to regulate the access of their roads to autonomous vehicles.

The legislation also threatens Maryland’s transportation workforce. Overall, just under 3% of all workers in the United States are employed in driving occupations.⁴ National estimates indicate that up to 5 million jobs could be lost due to self-driving vehicles.⁵ Driving occupations including truck drivers, bus drivers, and taxi drivers would be the hardest hit. Entry-level driving jobs, which provide stable employment for thousands of Marylanders, are at significant risk of disappearing altogether. HB 1295 offers no transition plan, no retraining, and no protections for the workers whose livelihoods will be displaced.

HB 1295 is dangerous; it authorizes fully autonomous vehicles to operate without human drivers, without proven safety performance, and without the regulatory infrastructure needed to protect Marylanders. Maryland should not be a testing ground for unproven technology. Until autonomous vehicles can meet and consistently demonstrate safety

³ “Autonomous Vehicle Accidents: NHTSA Crash Data (2019-2025.” Craft Law Firm.

⁴ “Stick Shift: Autonomous Vehicles, Driving Jobs, and The Future of Work.” Dr. Algernon Austin, Ms. Cherrie Bucknor, Mr. Kevin Cashman, Dr. Maya Rockey Moore. Center for Global Policy Solutions. March 2017.

⁵ “Rethinking Transportation 2020-2030.” James Arbib, Tony Seba. May 2017.



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performance equal to or greater than human drivers, they should not be allowed to operate without a physical human behind the wheel on our roads.

For these reasons, we urge an unfavorable vote on HB 1295.



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