



## **HB 1242/SB 786 "Transportation of Persons with Disabilities - Transportation Network Companies - Requirements" - UNFAVORABLE**

Dear Members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee:

My name is Ron Brooks. I am the Senior Director for Policy and Partnership at UZURV, a transportation network company (TNC), built from the ground up to provide transportation that meets the safety, accessibility and service needs of older adults and people with disabilities. In addition, I am a 33-year veteran of the public transit industry, where I have designed and delivered accessible transit and paratransit services for, and on behalf of public transit authorities as well as private companies. One more thing. I am totally blind, and I depend on accessible transit, paratransit, and other transportation services for every trip that involves a destination beyond my immediate neighborhood.

Because I am unable to drive, I depend on the type of transportation services that Transportation Network Companies (TNCs) provide. Over the past twelve years, I have taken more than 5,000 one-way trips on TNCs, and it is my direct experience as a blind traveler, and my considerable experience as a nationally respected paratransit leader, who has managed programs that utilize TNCs such as Uber, Lyft, and UZURV, that has led me to write in opposition to House Bill 1242.

I am opposed to HB 1242 because of what the bill will do, if adopted. Put simply, HB 1242 will exempt TNCs under contract with the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) from the current requirement that any driver providing paratransit service undergo state and national fingerprint-based criminal history checks administered by the MTA, and replace them with the much less rigorous checks conducted by consumer reporting agencies. As written, this bill will also eliminate the requirement for TNC drivers to complete training in passenger awareness, sensitivity and safety. It's training that anyone providing

paratransit in Maryland is required to undergo, and it's required by state law because we know it helps to ensure that service is safe, accessible, and dignified for riders. As I shared in my introduction, I am both a public transit professional with deep experience in paratransit management, as well as a person with a disability that makes it necessary for me to depend on services like MTA Mobility and MTA Call-a-Ride, and based on my experience, here's what matters for riders and for the safety and accessibility of paratransit services.

- Older adults and people with disabilities, who depend on paratransit, need to know that their driver is qualified to drive, appropriately trained, and safe, and they benefit from the peace of mind that comes from knowing that their driver has been appropriately screened. This bill will undermine both the background checks and training that TNC drivers receive.
- Many riders need their drivers to provide types of assistance that traditional TNCs such as Uber and Lyft do not provide. Riders often need the driver to come to the door, to provide assistance to and from the vehicle, and to help with folding and storing a wheelchair or walker. Providing these types of assistance appropriately and safely requires training. And if it's passed, this bill will exempt TNC drivers from receiving this training.
- Many riders, including me, travel with service animals, and unfortunately, the majority of riders who travel with service animals have experienced significant levels of discrimination from TNC drivers, who either do not know, or do not care, that the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) as well as Maryland state law requires them to transport us with our service animals. If passed, this bill will exempt drivers from receiving training about the ADA and the legal rights of service animal handlers. It's bad enough that I have to face the risk of a denied ride when I'm just taking a trip on my own dime, but when that trip is being provided by a public agency, and being subsidized by the taxpayers, such a crime is unforgivable. If passed, this bill will increase the odds that riders like me, who travel with service animals, will have our rights denied.

I want to close by explaining why I work for UZURV, because my reasons for working at UZURV are the same reasons that I oppose HB 1242.

# UZURV

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Unlike traditional TNCs, UZURV is an adaptive TNC built specifically to serve older adults and riders with disabilities, including ADA paratransit riders. We provide the efficiency and cost structure of a TNC model, but we layer on the safety, compliance, and training standards traditionally associated with paratransit providers. This includes, among other things, fingerprint-based criminal background checks. Here in Maryland, UZURV provided more than 1.5 million trips in 2025, and we did so with 98% on-time performance, and a Net Promoter Score of 82, which is considered a world-class score.

Those who support HB 1242 would have you believe that the goal of this bill is to allow TNCs to provide paratransit services. However, the simple fact is that TNCs already do – as long as they also meet the same background and training requirements as all other paratransit providers. UZURV is a TNC, and we are providing lots of service throughout the state—with drivers who meet current Maryland background and training requirements.

The real question to be answered is this. Does it make sense to exempt TNC drivers who wish to provide paratransit from the requirements to undergo rigorous fingerprint-based background checks and the kind of disability awareness and sensitivity training that promote rider safety, peace of mind, and service accessibility? For me, as both a person with disabilities and as an experienced paratransit professional, the answer is a resounding “NO!”

Please oppose HB 1242, and allow Maryland to continue leading the way in the responsible use of TNCs to deliver safe and accessible paratransit service for older adults and people with disabilities in Maryland. Thank you for your time and your efforts to ensure the safety of paratransit services for all Maryland residents who depend on it each day!

Sincerely,

**THE ADAPTIVE TRANSPORTATION NETWORK COMPANY**

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# UZURV

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Ron L. Brooks

Senior Director – Policy and Partnership

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