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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
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SB 909 - Vehicle Laws - Fully Autonomous Vehicles

Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee, it is my pleasure to present Senate Bill 909 - Vehicle Laws - Fully Autonomous Vehicles.

Fully autonomous vehicles are operated without a human driver. SB 909 creates a robust set of rules an autonomous vehicle would need to meet in order to legally use the roads in Maryland and authorizes the Maryland Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA) and the Maryland Insurance Administration (MIA) to establish the standards and requirements necessary for autonomous vehicles to operate safely here in Maryland. There are also provisions – worked out with law enforcement - to include our first responders and public safety officers, so they have the training, protocols, and understanding of how these vehicles work and what interactions with autonomous vehicles would look like.

To date, 25 states have passed substantially similar legislation, including our neighbors Pennsylvania and West Virginia, as well as states such as Michigan, Florida, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas. By passing SB 909, we would join those states in creating the conditions necessary to allow for autonomous vehicles on our roads.

AVs are a part of everyday life for hundreds of thousands of Americans every month. Whether they be passengers who cannot drive themselves or do not wish to, they can access autonomous vehicles providing them freedom of movement and an additional choice in how to interact with the world.

An autonomous vehicle doesn't drive drunk, read its phone, get tired, or respond emotionally to other road users' conduct; they don't speed or break the law. As a result, in states where they currently operate, data show that autonomous vehicles are significantly safer than a human driver.

Autonomous vehicles offer a safer alternative for those who could be subject to the biases of a human driver, including members of the blind community, who have many stories of other ride-sharing drivers refusing to pick them up.

This bill is a foundational piece in the puzzle of expanding transportation options for all Marylanders.

For the foregoing reasons, I respectfully request a favorable report on Senate Bill 909.