

Testimony
of
United Spinal Association

Submitted by

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For the

Council of the District of Columbia
Committee on Transportation and the Environment
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Bill 20-759, the Transportation Reorganization Act of 2014
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Good Morning Chairperson Cheh and distinguished members of the Transportation Committee and staff. Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony regarding Bill 20-759, the Transportation Reorganization Act of 2014. Thank you also for the opportunity to provide input through the summer working group sessions that led to the most recent draft of this bill. My name is Carol Tyson. I am a District resident and Senior Policy Associate for United Spinal Association. Founded in 1946 by paralyzed veterans, United Spinal is the largest disability-led nonprofit organization representing the interests of more than a million Americans living with spinal cord injuries and disorders. United Spinal has a long history of advocating for equal access to transportation for all.

I currently serve as the Vice-Chair of the DC Taxi Commission's Accessibility Advisory Committee, comprised of District agency staff, disability and industry stakeholders. This testimony reflects my own views and those of United Spinal Association only.

The DC Office of Disability Rights estimates that 20 percent of the District's population has a disability, or roughly 130,000 individuals. An estimated 2.1 million of the District's tourists are visitors with disabilities.ⁱ People with disabilities, like many District residents, rely on all forms of transportation to visit the District's sites, commute to work and school, contribute to their community, socialize, and attend to life's other necessities and pursuits. Yet, adults with disabilities are twice as likely as those without disabilities to have inadequate transportation (31 percent versus 13 percent).ⁱⁱ This statistic is played out in the District with few accessible cabs, no accessible transportation network company vehicles, inaccessible bus stops, and parking.

United Spinal thanks you for including in the responsibilities of the State Board of Transit expansion of transit service in underserved areas and improvement of access to transit for persons with disabilities. While both seem like common sense endeavors for any urban transportation agency or board, prioritizing access to service for all lays the groundwork for a transit system that we can all be proud of.

The State Board of Transit is tasked with approving new routes and schedules. United Spinal notes that more than half of the bus stops in the region are inaccessible. We urge any agency or board responsible for overseeing new routes to ensure the stops are accessible at the outset or to work with WMATA to make improvements.

United Spinal thanks you for the inclusion of a Multimodal Accessibility Advisory Council in this most recent draft. The Council would be comprised of persons with disabilities who would advise on how to improve access to all transit modes. This council has the potential to highlight greatly needed improvements and transform access to all modes in the District. United Spinal recommends broadening membership to seniors as well as persons with disabilities, since those with impairments that may limit access do not always identify as having a disability. United Spinal hopes that the Taxi Commission's Accessibility Advisory Committee will remain, however. The Committee is comprised of people with disabilities and

for-hire vehicle drivers and representatives. The Committee allows for a dialogue between the stakeholders around the need for increased accessibility and what driver's need to begin providing accessible service. Should the Committee be dissolved as a result of this process, we hope the For-Hire Vehicle and Multimodal Accessibility Advisory Councils can meet or liaise to discuss issues that affect both communities.

I love transit. As a kid, local buses were my way to escape into the city or to go on grand adventures. As an adult, transit is a necessity. This morning, I walked to a bus stop from my home on uneven pavement, took a bus to a Metro, rode the Red Line to my office and caught an inaccessible cab to the Wilson Building. I will likely take the Metro home, getting off at a station that often has a long line of inaccessible cabs waiting to take transit riders home after a long day of work. I cannot make use of the bikeshare because of my own disability, but I am still incredibly lucky. Much of my commute is inaccessible to many. Prioritizing access to all is a worthwhile endeavor and I am certain that the District is up to the task. Last month I looked out the window of the Red line Metro and noticed a person using a power wheelchair to zip down the Metropolitan Branch trail. They were able to avoid traffic, and uneven sidewalks, and prove that providing new transit modes that work for everyone is possible.

Thank you for your work. Please do not hesitate to contact United Spinal Association with any questions. We look forward to continuing to work with this Committee and District agencies towards access for all in the District.

ⁱ District of Columbia taxicab commission Disability Advisory Committee, *Comprehensive Report and Recommendations on Accessible Taxicab Service*, February 20, 2014.

ⁱⁱ CDC Promoting the Health of People with Disabilities, Department of Health and Human Services, at <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/pdf/AboutDHProgram508.pdf>