

United Spinal Association

Oral Testimony

Submitted by

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For the

Montgomery County, Maryland

County Council

Regarding

Bill 33-15, Taxicabs – Transportation Services Improvement Fund

July 14, 2015

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony regarding Bill 33-15. My name is Carol Tyson. I am the Director of Disability Policy for United Spinal Association. United Spinal is the largest disability-led nonprofit organization serving and representing the interests of more than a million Americans living with spinal cord injuries and disorders. We hold that access to transportation is a civil right. People with disabilities who reside or work in Montgomery County, or who visit, must have equal access to all transportation options, including taxi and transportation network company (TNC) service.

United Spinal supports this bill and the creation of a Transportation Services Improvement Fund. We commend the council for recognizing the diluting effect inaccessible TNCs have had on the percentage of accessible for-hire vehicles in the market, and believe measures must be taken to ensure for-hire vehicle service is available to all. Each additional accessible taxi on the road provides life-changing service to wheelchair users – granting convenient, and at times the only available, transportation to work, school, appointments, and arts and culture. Accessible taxis can provide back-up transportation when Metro elevators are broken, or late at night when public transportation, including paratransit, is no longer running. Accessible transportation ensures that each and every one of us, and those we care about, can remain active should we find ourselves living with a temporary or permanent disability.

United Spinal encourages the Council and regulating authorities to ensure accessible taxi operators receiving these funds are complying with training as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and that accessible taxis purchased are providing service as intended and comply with ADA standards.

Finally, United Spinal urges the council to reconsider providing funds for the “additional time involved in providing accessible taxicab services” (§53-801 (d)(C)). Providing funds for additional time is, in effect, creating a subsidy for providing service to people with disabilities and amounts to unintended discrimination. It may take passengers without disabilities additional time to enter a vehicle if they are carrying bags. On some buses passengers may take additional time when loading their bike. We would not consider paying these drivers additional funds for transporting these passengers. We would not pay increased wages to restaurant wait staff for taking the order of a person with a disability or any other public accommodation who is required, by law, to provide equal levels of service to all patrons. The time it takes to provide quality service should be considered part of the cost of doing business with any customer. Funds should be limited to offsets such as additional gas, vehicle purchasing, creation of quality training, and public awareness campaigns to ensure potential passengers are aware of the additional service options.

In just a few weeks the nation will be celebrating the 25th anniversary of the ADA, legislation that continues to promote the inclusion and contribution of people with disabilities in everyday life, though barriers remain. United Spinal thanks the Council for lifting up one of the remaining barriers and ensuring accessibility to for-hire vehicle service.