



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

District of Columbia Taxi Commission Agency Public Oversight Hearing

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Good afternoon Chairperson Cheh, distinguished members and staff of the Transportation Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony regarding the performance of the District of Columbia Taxi Commission (DCTC). My name is Carol Tyson. I am a District resident and Director of Disability Policy 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.

United Spinal would like to thank the DC Taxi Commission staff and leadership, as well as the companies and drivers of accessible taxis, for their hard work in the past year. We know from discussions that they are taking the mandate to ensure accessible service seriously. United Spinal will always call for a 100% accessible fleet of for-hire vehicles. Still, we recognize the efforts of the Commission to increase service, and support the taxi industry as they move towards complying with the requirements of the Taxicab Service Improvement Amendment Act of 2012 (DC Taxi Act). We acknowledge especially the work of those implementing the CAPS-DC program.

United Spinal has a few outstanding concerns and recommendations for the Committee and Commission. We hope the Commission will continue to implement rulemaking and programs following from requirements in the 2012 law. On December 31st, least 6% of each taxicab fleet was to be wheelchair accessible. Based on estimates this would result in access to 1% of the District's total taxi fleet. We urge the Commission to strongly enforce the requirement. In addition, United Spinal urges the Commission, and this Committee, to do all it can to support compliance with other requirements from the bill, namely that all wheelchair accessible taxi drivers receive proper training. The Commission is also required to "develop a program to provide grants, loans, and other types of financial assistance and incentives to applicants and owners to offset the cost of buying, retrofitting, maintaining, and operating a vehicle for use as a wheelchair accessible cab" (DC Taxi Act, Sec20f(d)).

United Spinal recommends a public awareness and education campaign for drivers on the need and requirements for accessible for-hire service, and which would let the public, including tourists, know that there are additional accessible taxis available. This recommendation was made in the Accessibility Advisory Committee's initial report.

People with disabilities, like everyone else, rely on multiple modes of transportation. The Metro, buses, sidewalks and for-hire vehicles provide a network of transportation options. For people with disabilities for-hire vehicles can provide crucial transportation when sidewalks, curb cuts, and bus stops are completely inaccessible due to snow and ice as we have all experienced over the last month.

Accessible transportation is important for those of us who live with a permanent disability, but also for people who find themselves temporarily disabled. Yesterday, United Spinal received an unsolicited email from a Principal of a respected law firm here in the District. Mr. Thomas had minor surgery on his leg and needed to use a scooter for 5 weeks. He used a wheelchair accessible taxi to get around and had a less than stellar experience. Mr. Thomas shared, "Not only does there need to be more wheelchair accessible service but it needs to be much more liable and companies need to be held accountable when they fail to pick people up on [a] timely basis ... If I were a permanent power wheelchair or scooter user, I would have to rethink the whole notion of continuing to work in my current setting, or at all."

United Spinal calls on this Committee to do all it can to support the taxi commission, companies, and drivers in their efforts to ensure accessible taxi service is provided in the District. We also call on the Committee and the Commission to hold accountable all for-hire vehicle service providers to ensure equal access. In San Francisco, there has been a decline in the number of wheelchair accessible taxis over the past year and a half. Regulators cite the presence of Transportation Network Companies (TNCs) in the market as the reason for the decline. TNCs are not required to provide accessible service in San Francisco or the District, but can draw drivers and passengers from existing taxi companies. Accessibility requirements for TNCs, incentives like a tax credit, or a fund that will support the purchase and operation of accessible vehicles, are needed now more than ever.

This July, the country and the District will celebrate the 25th Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The ADA prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability - requiring equal access to people with disabilities to schools, employment, restaurants, and other public accommodations. There would be no better time for the District to hold itself accountable to the ideals of this Act. We hope the Commission and Committee will do everything in its power to ensure that people with disabilities, both permanent and temporary, are provided access to the same services that all rely on in the District. Thank you.