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PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

February 11, 2021

Chairman Dereck E. Davis
House Economic Matters Committee
House Office Building, Room 231
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: HB 558- FAVORABLE - For-Hire Driving and Vehicles - Requirements

Dear Chair Davis and Committee Members:

The Maryland Public Service Commission reviewed the State's for-hire driving statutes and identified several provisions that no longer reflect modern-day realities. Consequently, the Commission urges a favorable vote on House Bill 558, to make various technical fixes to the *Public Utilities Article* and *Transportation Article*. These improvements will benefit for-hire drivers, for-hire companies, and the public.

The current law, *PUA 10-104(a)(1)(iv)* requires the applicant for a for-hire drivers license to file with their application two recent photographs, of a size that may be easily attached to the license. As a result of collaboration with the Maryland Motor Vehicle Administration, a Maryland driver no longer is required to submit or be photographed by the Commission if the applicant provides consent to obtain the applicant's driver license photo from the MVA. Implementation of the current procedures has eliminated the need for the applicant to commute to Commission offices, which is important for public health and public safety during the COVID-19 pandemic.

PUA 10-104(d)(2) currently requires an individual applying for a Baltimore City taxicab license or renewal of a Baltimore City taxicab license to submit proof of having successfully completed a course approved by the Commission that includes in the curriculum: courteous treatment of passengers, geography and map reading for the jurisdiction in which the taxicab services will be provided; and tourist information for the jurisdiction in which taxicab services will be provided. HB 558 eliminates the required course for Baltimore City taxicab drivers. The requirement is outdated because due to the evolution of electronic assistance in taxicabs (i.e., GPS tablets or laptops and mapping etc.), the course is no longer necessary. The course requirement is only for Baltimore City taxicab drivers and with the transformation in the industry with sedan and Transportation Network Services (Uber/Lyft), the requirement is unjust and creates an expense for the applicant that is not equally required for other transportation services. Course scheduling creates a delay in the licensing of drivers and in some circumstances, such as the pandemic, the course may not be available.

Currently, *PUA 10-206(a)(1)* requires the name of the taxicab permit holder of the taxicab to be permanently painted or affixed on one door on each side of a taxicab, in letters at least 2.5 inches high. HB 558 would allow for the elimination of the requirement of the permit holder's name to be affixed on each side of a taxicab regulated by the Commission. The requirement for the additional lettering is outdated and can confuse the general public with identifying the vehicle. The association name and permit number are more than adequate for identifying the taxicab. Elimination of the requirement would be a cost savings for the permit holder.

TA 21-1127 currently specifies requirements for the operation of a limousine of a certain size, operators licensing requirements and display of required registration plates. The current language fails to include many drivers that operate motor vehicles for-hire in this State. Updating the language would broaden law enforcement capabilities for this section.

Lastly *TA 22-412(d)* specifies requirements for seat belts for every vehicle registered in this State. Also included in this section is an exclusion for taxicabs -- for this section only, they are not defined as a "motor vehicle." HB 558 will align seat belt requirements for taxicabs with all other vehicles required to have seat belts in this State. The current language is outdated and does not correlate with the current style of vehicles utilized as taxicabs. The bill would ensure the riding public has access to seat belts, as designed by the vehicle manufacturer, which meet State safety standards.

Passage of HB 558 will enact important safety and cost-saving updates to current law that will provide benefits to for-hire drivers, for-hire companies, and the public. The Public Service Commission urges a favorable vote for this bill. Thank you for your consideration of this information. Please contact Lisa Smith, Director of Legislative Affairs, at 410-336-6288 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Jason M. Stanek
Chairman