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PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

January 29, 2024

Chair Brian J. Feldman
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
2 West, Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: SB 153 – INFORMATION – Maryland Department of Transportation - Child Exploitation and Human Trafficking Awareness, Training and Response

Dear Chair Feldman and Committee Members:

Senate Bill 153 requires the Maryland Department of Transportation (“MDOT”) to develop or identify and implement a training program for certain transportation–sector employees, taxicab drivers, and transportation network operators (“TNOs”) on the identification and reporting of suspected child exploitation and human trafficking victims. The Maryland Public Service Commission (“PSC”) has regulatory authority over transportation companies operating for-hire within the State of Maryland. This authority requires that the Commission, in general, issue permits to companies and vehicles upon receiving documented evidence of adherence to certain criteria related to insurance standards, inspections, vehicle age, etc.

This bill would add to the Public Utilities Article (“PUA”) by requiring a driver of a taxicab or a driver for a TNO, to complete MDOT’s training program prior to obtaining or renewing a license issued by the PSC. There are approximately 58,000 licensed TNOs currently in the State. It should be noted that this bill does not include the approximately 3,350 passenger-for-hire drivers licensed by the Commission that operate sedans, limousines, and other passenger-for-hire vehicles. Further, drivers that operate commercial motor vehicles transporting sixteen or more passengers do not need a passenger-for-hire license, but only a commercial motor vehicle driver’s license with the appropriate endorsements. The Commission has no role in the approval of commercial drivers’ licenses and therefore would not be captured under this legislation.

While the proposed training is important, this bill will increase the activities of the Commission staff, requiring additional resources as well as potential changes to COMAR. To implement the requirements of the bill, the PSC would need an Administrative Specialist I position, along with funding to modify the existing database used by the PSC, in order to integrate the completion of training into each driver’s record

I appreciate the opportunity to provide information on SB 153. Please contact the Commission's Director of Legislative Affairs, Christina M. Ochoa, at christina.ochoa1@maryland.gov if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Frederick H. Hoover". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'F' and 'H'.

Frederick H. Hoover, Chair
Maryland Public Service Commission