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Sponsor Testimony – House Health and Aging Committee
House Bill 365
December 9, 2015

Chairwoman Gonzales, Vice-Chairman Huffman, Ranking-Member Antonio and members of the House Health and Aging Committee, I thank you for this opportunity to present sponsor testimony on House Bill 365.

House Bill 365 will revise chapter 4766 of the Ohio Revised Code to make taxis more accessible to those requiring the use of a wheelchair.

In 1990, when the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed into law, most wheelchairs were manual, and could be folded or stowed for transportation purposes. Today, twenty-five years later, wheelchairs are in common use, and people who use them have few, if any, transportation alternatives.

Currently in Ohio, accessible taxis exist in very small numbers, inhibiting the ability of people in power wheelchairs to: 1) go anywhere, if public transit or paratransit won't take them there; 2) go anywhere, during off hours or on off days for that transit system; and 3) travel freely within and to Ohio via plane, train or bus, because they are then stranded at the airport or station.

Under current law, an accessible taxi is technically defined as an “ambulette” and is subject to the rules for ambulette certification, maintenance, and licensure. The term “ambulette” implies the availability of limited medical service during transportation. However, a person requiring the use of a wheelchair does not automatically require the immediate availability of any form of medical service, and this assumption has the effect of limiting transportation options.

This incorrect definition increases the cost of providing wheelchair accessible taxi service by requiring extra training and equipment for no reason, based on an assumption that people in wheelchairs are medically fragile, which is not necessarily the case.

Eliminating the requirements of accessible taxis to be governed as ambulettes under ORC 4766 will reduce the cost of operation. Additionally, this legislation will remove barriers to any person

requiring the use of a wheelchair by increasing travel options and thereby maximizing a citizen's ability to participate in the community and local economy.

Equal access to America's private transportation fleets is a matter of fundamental fairness. Significant growth in the number of wheelchair-accessible taxi vehicles in the years ahead may make it easier for workers with disabilities to enter the labor force, or to return to work. Ohio should lead on the issue of accessible transport. This will help ensure that Ohio is a place where our ever-increasing population of seniors, people with disabilities, and wounded warriors can fully participate in our communities.

Thank you Chairman Gonzales, Vice-Chairman Huffman, Ranking-Member Antonio and the members of the committee for allowing us to offer sponsor testimony on House Bill 365. We would be happy to answer any questions from the committee at this time.