

October 10, 2017

**Transportation, Commerce, and Workforce Committee**

**Testimony RE: HB 195 Modify law regarding transport of people requiring mobility aid**

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Thank-you for the opportunity to testify today. I'm Dr. Kara Ayers and I live in Mason, Ohio. Today, I'm representing myself-as an Ohioan with a disability. I'm also the mom of three children, one of whom has a disability and may need alternative transportation options someday. Professionally, I'm the Associate Director of the University of Cincinnati Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities. In this role, I've had the opportunity to learn a great deal about the transportation needs of Ohioans with disabilities. Revision of the current law is a significant and immediate need.

One of my favorite ways that my job and personal life intersects is the chance to get out into the community and talk to people-families, business owners, and community members-about what we can do to make the world a more inclusive and accepting place. We know that people with disabilities want to work. Most of us though (around 75% by many estimates), aren't employed. We know that people with disabilities want to get out into their communities. We want to go to the movies, work out at the gym, and meet friends out for drinks-just like you. I work closely on the issue of parenting with a disability and parents have even more places we need to go-a trip to the pediatrician, dropping by school for a teacher conference, and cheering on our kids at sporting events. Whenever we work on these issues, we hear the same barrier cited over and over as the most difficult to overcome. It's transportation.

There are no easy fixes to transportation. It's true-it's a problem and a challenge across the country. In Ohio, our cities and rural areas vary widely. Even in cities with accessible transportation options, a very small percentage of employment opportunities (not to mention other community options) fall in the area serviced by buses. With this relatively small, no-cost update to the legislation, however, we can make progress. We can open the door for companies who have successfully established wheelchair taxi services in other cities to come to Ohio. We can improve the alignment of current legislation.

Consider the current conflict: Based on federal law, an Uber driver is prohibited from refusing to pick me up based on disability. Yet, in Ohio, that Uber driver would also be expected to be licensed by the State Board of Emergency, Medical, Fire, and Transportation Services. This doesn't make sense.

On most days, I'm fortunate to own and be able to drive my own vehicle. My disability can change in an instant, however. This spring, I broke my hip. It's still healing and I'm not yet able to drive the distance from Cincinnati to Columbus. Today-I rode up with a colleague. So by the current definition, my colleague's car was an "ambulette" this morning! In the weeks following my fracture, I was frustrated but not surprised that transportation was also my biggest barrier. An accessible taxi option would have allowed me to get back to my work in the community sooner than it took for me to heal and drive on my own.

One final reason in support of updating this legislation relates to the need to consider the attitudes and values that underlie policies like these. The current legislation assumes that I'm always in need of medically-related support, including when riding to and from wherever I'm going. This is inaccurate.

Attitudes hold us back in the realm of transportation. We have work to do in this area. I know I've previously mentioned that Uber drivers are prohibited from refusing to pick me up in other cities but still-due to outdated attitudes-I've been refused a ride several times during business travel. My most memorable refusal occurred when I'd called an Uber to take me to the White House. I'd been invited to speak on the issue of parenting with a disability. I was reminded of the ever incumbent barrier known as transportation when a few minutes before I was set to arrive, my taxi driver refused to open the door, told me my chair wouldn't fit (it would), and drove off. We can't fix these kinds of attitudes overnight but we can work together to make improvements.

The proposed bill is an easy, straight-forward, budget neutral fix to a policy in need of update. Many advocates have been working on this for years. It won't fix everything but it's progress and in the realm of transportation-that's much needed. Please join me in supporting the exemption of taxicabs and vehicles owned by transportation companies from the requirements to obtain a license from the Board.

Thank-you for your time and consideration.