



COMMISSION ON AGING

April 20, 2018

Subject: Testimony on Bill 13-18

Dear County Council Members,

I am writing on behalf of the Commission on Aging. We were chagrined to learn that the County Executive submitted Expedited Bill 13-18 Taxicabs- Transportation Services Improvement Fund (TSIF) - Use of Fund, which was introduced in the April 3rd County Council Session.

Bill 13-18 expands the purpose and use of the TSIF for "any transportation purpose in the County." The bill places no limits on the type of transportation purposes and does not even define what the phrase "transportation purposes" means. The bill's objective is in direct opposition to the original intended purpose of the TSIF, which was to increase the availability of accessible taxis for people with disabilities, older adults and people with limited income. This was especially important in that Transportation Network companies (TNCs), i.e., ride-hailing services such as Uber and Lyft, do not have accessible vehicles.

The law establishing this fund was passed in response to concerns raised by the Commission on People with Disabilities (CPWD) and the Commission on Aging about the entry into Montgomery County of TNCs aggravating an already limited accessible taxi service in our county. Hence, COA continues to support these funds being used for the purpose set forth in Bill 33-15, specifically "... to offset higher costs of operating accessible taxicabs in the County, and to provide incentives for improving or expanding transportation options for eligible senior citizens and persons of limited income."

Following the passage of Bill 33-15, before regulations were put in place, COA and CPWD both understood that the regulations that were being proposed were likely not going to adequately support the intended purpose of providing more accessible taxis on the road for two reasons: (1) the subsidy for putting accessible features in a taxi was not sufficient to cover the cost; and (2) the subsidy for drivers to rent accessible vehicles (AVs) was not sufficient to incentivize them. Both Commissions wrote letters in March and June 2017 regarding Executive Order No. 1-17, Transportation Services Improvement Fund, raising these issues and suggesting different (higher?) subsidies. Despite our stated concerns, the regulations went into effect. Today, there are only 60 available AVs (out of 800) and only 20 AVs are on the road at any time. Hence, the regulations did not provide enough dollars for subsidies to make a meaningful difference in the number of AVs available for the intended beneficiaries. At the same time, the funds in the TSIF continue to accumulate and to not be effectively used.

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The County is now in a position of having a large pool of funds in the TSIF (\$1.5 million) and is proposing in the CE's budget to take these funds away from the TSIF and its intended beneficiaries for other purposes, thereby exacerbating an already untenable situation for these vulnerable residents.

Although this appears to be solely a budgetary issue, it also presents an ethical and moral issue. That is, by removing funds intended to increase the mobility of people with disabilities, older adults and people with limited income, the County may be worsening their social isolation, which could in turn negatively impact their quality of life and even place their health and safety at risk.

This is an opportunity for the County Council to not only keep the funds in the budget for their intended purpose, but, to enhance the TSIF regulations to ensure that they accomplish what the Council intended: operationalizing more AVs and incentivizing drivers so that there are more AVs on the road 24/7. Further, this will move the County closer toward its goal of 100% AVs by 2025.

COA recommends the following:

- Funds are kept in the TSIF to enable more AVs (e.g., 2x the number currently, i.e., 120 AVs, in the near term) in the County for the benefit of people with disabilities, older adults and people with limited income,
- The regulations that are currently in place are reevaluated and improved by a Task Group that the County Council establishes. The Task Group would include representatives from the County Council, COA, CPWD, Taxi Commission, DOT, and HHS. The regulatory improvements would ensure that the funds are effective in operationalizing more AVs and incentivizing drivers. This would support the ultimate goal of providing more AVs for our residents with disabilities, older adults and those with limited incomes.

Thank you for your consideration of our concerns and recommendations.

Sincerely,

Isabelle Schoenfeld, Chair
Commission on Aging