

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

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OFFICE OF THE D.C. TAXICAB COMMISSION

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PUBLIC HEARING

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WEDNESDAY
SEPTEMBER 17, 2014

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The Commission met in the Old City
Council Chambers, 441 4th Street, N.W.,
Washington, D.C., at 10:20 a.m., Paul Cohn,
Commissioner, presiding.

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:

RON M. LINTON, Chairperson
ANTHONY MUHAMMAD, Commissioner
STANLEY TAPSCOTT, Commissioner

STAFF PRESENT:

JUANDA MIXON
JACQUES LERNER, ESQ., General Counsel
MONIQUE BOCOCK, ESQ., Assistant General
Counsel

1 P-R-O-C-E-E-D-I-N-G-S

2 10:19 a.m.

3 COMMISSIONER COHN: Good morning,
4 everyone. All you smiling, happy faces, thank
5 you for being here this evening -- this
6 morning, excuse me. It's an early morning for
7 me.

8 On behalf of the DC Taxi
9 Commission we have scheduled this public
10 hearing on Wednesday, September the 17th in
11 the Old Council Chambers to receive testimony
12 on its notice of proposed rulemaking to amend
13 Chapters 5, 6, and 8 of Title 31 of the DC
14 Municipal Regulations: Modern Taxicab
15 Associations, Vehicle Retirement, and Issuance
16 of DCTC Vehicle Licenses.

17 The notice was approved for
18 publication as proposed rulemaking at the
19 Special Commission Meeting on August 6, 2014
20 and is available on the Commission's website.

21 We have used a protocol to divide
22 the hearing into two parts.

1 For those who intend to testify,
2 the first part of the hearing will consist of
3 speakers on behalf of an association or
4 advocacy group that represents the vehicle
5 owners and operators.

6 The speakers may wish to appear
7 together, with their leadership, or with the
8 representatives and must provide DCTC with 10
9 paper copies of the presentation delivered to
10 the office.

11 All of this has been done. So
12 thank you very much.

13 We have one, two, three, four,
14 five on the first panel and four on the second
15 panel.

16 I would like to thank Mr.
17 Tapscott, my fellow Commissioner, for being
18 here and listening to this today.

19 And Jacques Lerner, our Counsel.

20 And Ms. Bockock, our Assistant
21 General Counsel.

22 Thank you very much.

1 Let's have a moment of silence and
2 we'll start with the testimony.

3 Thank you.

4 I would like to call Mr. Jeff
5 Schaeffer as our first speaker.

6 MR. SCHAEFFER: Jeffrey Schaeffer,
7 District Cab Company, Transco Incorporated.
8 Thank you for allowing me to speak on the
9 chapters and proposed rulemaking.

10 First of all, we talked about
11 Modern Taxi Association Chapter 5. I'm a
12 little confused about the Modern Taxi
13 Association. It appears to be an association
14 being formed or a way for people who have dual
15 ownership to get out of their vehicles or
16 enter another vehicle.

17 A lot of this stemmed from a March
18 1, 2006 residency law from Jim Graham when
19 drivers who were not a resident of the
20 District of Columbia could not put a vehicle
21 on, could not get an H tag.

22 They circumvented the residency

1 law and joined the company, used the company's
2 name and the company went on the title.

3 So it appears now that they're
4 going to benefit, these individuals who
5 circumvented the regulations on residency, and
6 reward them with a title, with the ability to
7 put a title in their name and get an H tag on.

8 It wasn't clear to me what happens
9 to the existing H tag, if it's adding two
10 vehicles or if it's just taking that vehicle
11 off, out of the company's name into an
12 individual's name or out of dual ownership
13 into an individual's name.

14 It also seems the benefits of this
15 would be to get new wheelchair accessible
16 vehicles on the street. And I think there's
17 other ways to do that.

18 However, if they do move forward
19 with the wheelchair accessible vehicles, there
20 was nothing mentioned about them being under
21 an approved dispatch system to monitor the
22 usage of the wheelchair accessible vehicles to

1 ensure that they're servicing the disability
2 community.

3 In a lot of jurisdictions they put
4 wheelchair accessible vehicles on as new
5 vehicles to increase numbers and these
6 vehicles were simply just used for
7 transportation, not for the disability
8 community.

9 So I believe that it's important
10 that if you're going to have wheelchair
11 accessible vehicles on, there should be some
12 kind of monitoring.

13 And then in the Modern Taxi
14 Association 504.7(g) it talks about five years
15 for the association to be in compliance.

16 I think five years is too long for
17 someone to come into compliance. My fear is
18 a loophole.

19 There needs to be some barriers to
20 the entrance from an outsider coming in and
21 taking 100 drivers from a fleet or numerous
22 fleets and saying that they will comply with

1 regulations in five years. And then work for
2 four years, 11.5 months, and then fold it up
3 and extract from the community instead of
4 putting something back in it.

5 As far as Chapter 6, vehicle
6 retirement, vehicle retirement has changed a
7 couple of times over the past few years. The
8 most recent proposal states it will not go
9 into effect until -- it will not change the
10 current vehicle that's on the street.

11 But it doesn't take into effect
12 that if somebody gets in an accident and their
13 vehicle is totally lost, they still don't get
14 to put another vehicle on under a new time.

15 If it's after January this
16 regulation states it would have to be less
17 than 100,000 miles when it first goes on. It
18 could only get a 45,000 mile per year life.

19 I think all of these are just far
20 too restrictive. It makes a standard gasoline
21 taxi four years. There's no way you can get
22 a return on investment for four years on a

1 standard gasoline taxi.

2 The 100,000 mile issue in
3 609.6(b), I purchase vehicles a lot. The
4 availability of cars under 100,000 miles is
5 limited. The majority of the rental vehicles
6 I put on are right over 100,000 miles,
7 105,000, 110,000, 108,000.

8 So I think that you're really
9 limiting the availability and increasing the
10 investment dramatically when you keep it under
11 100,000.

12 If the Commission sees it needs to
13 be a mileage placed restriction, I think
14 150,000 miles would be much more suitable.
15 Very rarely do I put a vehicle on over 150,000
16 miles.

17 The 609.5 talks about 45,000 per
18 year.

19 If you have a vehicle that's only
20 good for four years such as a standard
21 gasoline taxi, that would be 180,000 miles.
22 Well, if it's already got 90,000 when it first

1 goes on then you'll only get 90,000 miles in
2 those four years. It's just simply not
3 realistic.

4 So again, I think the vehicle
5 retirement should stay with what it is. If
6 you want to have a cap on mileage I think
7 350,000 is somewhat of the norm throughout the
8 states. It should stay with the seven years.

9 The intent to incentivize fuel
10 efficient and wheelchair accessible vehicles
11 is important. But it shouldn't result at the
12 suffering from a non-wheelchair accessible or
13 non-fuel efficient vehicle.

14 So I believe you can keep those at
15 seven years and still offer 10, 11, 12 years
16 for other vehicles that the Commission sees
17 important to get on.

18 The issue on public vehicle for
19 hire issuing licenses, it appears that this
20 kind of coexists with Chapter 5, Chapter 5
21 being the Modern Taxi Association, the ability
22 for people to come get a new H tag.

1 So Chapter 10 I guess what I'd be
2 looking at if you move in this direction would
3 be to have a limitation.

4 I attached a chart of the cabs per
5 capita for every licensed cab over 100,000.
6 It lists numerous jurisdictions here. You see
7 how it's overwhelmingly flooded, the cabs per
8 capita in Washington DC.

9 That's not including shared ride
10 vehicles, not including limousines. It's just
11 taxicabs. It's already more than triple other
12 jurisdictions.

13 Lastly, I just had a couple of
14 questions. Again, like I mentioned earlier,
15 I was trying to get clarification on the tag
16 for the MTA.

17 When it's formed when a driver
18 applies for a new tag, does he turn the old
19 tag in, does he take that tag with him? So
20 that was one question.

21 I had another question about the
22 current 609 states that all taxicabs 2004 and

1 older must be out of service by January 1,
2 2015. I wanted to verify that.

3 And then I wanted to ask that
4 since the Commission now has accurate data
5 from all the PSPs if they looked at the
6 percentage of the current registered taxicabs
7 2004 and older, and what that percentage would
8 be coming off the street simultaneously.

9 Because if 2004 and older have to
10 come off the street December 31, 12:01 a.m.
11 January 1 this year, you're going to have a
12 lot of people at the same time having to
13 replace vehicles. I believe it could be 50
14 percent of the existing market.

15 Thank you for letting me speak.

16 COMMISSIONER COHN: Thank you, Mr.
17 Schaeffer. We appreciate your testimony.
18 We'll make sure your questions are answered.

19 I have a question for you, if you
20 don't mind.

21 MR. SCHAEFFER: Yes.

22 COMMISSIONER COHN: What do you

1 think your ROI should be?

2 MR. SCHAEFFER: I'm sorry?

3 COMMISSIONER COHN: Your ROI?

4 MR. SCHAEFFER: Seven years I
5 think is good, seven years is good. Usually
6 I take a vehicle off in six years. Very
7 rarely do I run to seven.

8 I do have some vehicles that are
9 single drivers on and may not work that much,
10 and those vehicles go seven years.

11 Very rarely do I take anything
12 over seven. The majority of my vehicles run
13 between five and six years now.

14 COMMISSIONER COHN: Okay. Thank
15 you very much.

16 MR. SCHAEFFER: Thank you, sir.

17 COMMISSIONER COHN: Mr. Roy
18 Spooner, please.

19 MR. SPOONER: Good morning.

20 COMMISSIONER COHN: Good morning,
21 Mr. Spooner.

22 MR. SPOONER: Can you hear me?

1 COMMISSIONER COHN: Loud and
2 clear.

3 MR. SPOONER: Thank you. Thanks
4 for giving me the opportunity to speak this
5 morning.

6 At this very critical juncture
7 when the DC taxicab industry is besieged with
8 unfair competition from unregulated and
9 illegal sources, I question the timing and
10 necessity to create a new operating MTA entity
11 in an already structurally confusing
12 environment made up of company, association,
13 PSP, and DDS.

14 It is not clear if this new entity
15 is restricted to current operating DC taxicab
16 associations and companies, or if it's also
17 open to outside companies that can use this
18 new entity as their access to bypass current
19 restrictions on new taxicab companies in an
20 already overcrowded arena.

21 The stated intent of the proposed
22 MTA, which is an allowance of five years to

1 become fully wheelchair compliant, is to
2 increase wheelchair accessibility.

3 I submit that the same goal could
4 be accomplished by modifying the exist taxicab
5 ownership rules to purchase a new or used
6 wheelchair vehicle with higher service limits
7 without adding confusion and conflict to the
8 already belabored taxicab industry.

9 We fully support any effort to
10 enhance accessible service of the disabled
11 community. But the proposed creation of an
12 additional operating level that could
13 encompass multiple company affiliations should
14 be tabled.

15 The proposed vehicle service
16 limits is a commendable effort to bring more
17 fuel efficient and accessible vehicles into
18 the DC taxicab fleet.

19 The replacement of the already
20 aggressive seven year age limit for all
21 vehicle types with a sliding scale is welcome.
22 But the significant reduction of gasoline

1 vehicle types to four years does not provide
2 an appropriate time frame for a return on
3 investment.

4 The service limit reduction for
5 gasoline type vehicles is being proposed as
6 improvements in fuel efficiency from higher
7 federal standards are occurring. And more
8 drivers and companies are voluntarily
9 converting smaller and more expensive but fuel
10 efficient vehicles.

11 Standard gasoline vehicles should
12 remain at no less than the current seven year
13 limit.

14 I propose the following vehicle
15 service limits for consideration.

16 For CNG and fuel cell vehicles, 13
17 years for accessible and 11 years for non-
18 accessible.

19 Diesel E-85, meaning ethanol 85,
20 LP and hybrid vehicles, 11 years for
21 accessible and nine years for non-accessible.

22 Standard gasoline, nine years for

1 accessible and seven years for non-accessible.

2 The proposed regulations does not
3 stipulate whether wheelchair accessible
4 vehicles being acquired and placed into
5 service under the newly created MTA will be
6 required to join our affiliate with a
7 centralized dispatch service.

8 It is only through a centralized
9 and controlled dispatch service that the
10 disabled community will be able to fully
11 access and benefit from the enhanced vehicle
12 availability and service capabilities.

13 Maximum access to this enhanced
14 service will not be accomplished by street
15 hails.

16 The proposed regulation does not
17 mention driver training and certification to
18 operate the new wheelchair accessible vehicles
19 and how this service will be monitored to
20 ensure that the set objectives are being met.

21 Wheelchair accessible service is
22 specialized and requires an appropriate

1 operating infrastructure and certified driver
2 fleet to be successful.

3 It is ironic to note that the
4 burden to increase the very costly and
5 unprofitable wheelchair accessible service is
6 being placed in the financially struggling
7 taxicab industry and not on the entities that
8 are threatening to eliminate the taxicab
9 industry.

10 If we are forced out as is the
11 intent of the disruption, who will be left to
12 provide this critical service?

13 The proposed new DCTC vehicle
14 license as proposed is not a replacement for
15 DMV vehicle registration.

16 If so, what is the intended
17 purpose and necessity for this additional step
18 to vehicle licensing? Is there a fee
19 associated with this new license and is it a
20 replacement for the current one-stop card?

21 It is interesting to note that a
22 city administrator testified at a recent

1 transportation committee hearing on his
2 opposition to the proposed legislation to
3 eliminate DCTC that all taxicab vehicle
4 licensing approval and authority would be
5 moved from DCTC to DMV.

6 This proposed regulatory change
7 seems to conflict with the outgoing mayor's
8 intent.

9 The new regulation seems to be the
10 first steps in creating a medallion system
11 because of the proposed perpetual
12 transferrable rights of the wheelchair
13 accessible vehicle license.

14 I'm not offering an opinion on the
15 merits or opposition to a medallion system.

16 As an active participant in the
17 fight against the threats to the taxicab
18 industry and trying to keep a company relevant
19 in this very hostile environment, I strongly
20 recommend that any consideration of a
21 medallion system should be fully vetted for
22 long term sustainability, especially in the

1 current financially unstable, rapidly
2 evolving, and uncertain environment.

3 Thank you.

4 COMMISSIONER COHN: Thank you very
5 much, Mr. Spooner. Thank you for your
6 testimony.

7 MR. SPOONER: Thank you.

8 COMMISSIONER COHN: I appreciate
9 it.

10 Mr. Abebe Desta and Mr. Robel
11 Yetmgeta?

12 MR. YETMGETA: Good morning.

13 COMMISSIONER COHN: Good morning.

14 MR. YETMGETA: We are representing
15 the DC Drivers United. Thank you for having
16 us and giving us the opportunity to present
17 our testimony.

18 COMMISSIONER COHN: I still can't
19 hear you. I'm sorry. Which mister are you?

20 MR. YETMGETA: Robel.

21 COMMISSIONER COHN: Thank you.

22 MR. YETMGETA: DC Drivers United

1 for Equal Rides is a cab driver formed and led
2 organization dedicated to improving the
3 working conditions of cab drivers who entered
4 the taxicab industry since 2006, the year in
5 which the rules regarding the registration of
6 taxicabs by non-resident DC cab drivers
7 changed.

8 Our goal is improve cab drivers'
9 working conditions in order to strengthen
10 their ability to modernize the industry and
11 ensure the ongoing emergence of high quality
12 service to the riders.

13 According DMV, the number of
14 drivers in this category is about 3,000.

15 DC Drivers United for Equal Rides
16 demand and support the moratorium to be lifted
17 so that formation of new companies or
18 associations can be permitted for drivers who
19 entered the industry after 2006.

20 That can help its members to
21 replace their existing cabs, buy fuel
22 efficient and environmentally friendly cars

1 that ultimately will allow them to be part of
2 the modernization process.

3 It will also give DC cab drivers
4 equal access to entrepreneur opportunities so
5 that they can serve all riders, including the
6 disabled, to be able to hail a cab on the
7 street, and set up a decent dispatch system
8 that can enable them to compete with the
9 others.

10 By replacing the older model cars
11 with new ones, cab drivers will be able to
12 operate in safe working conditions and
13 minimize operating costs such as fuel and
14 maintenance.

15 New tags can be issued for those
16 cab drivers whose cars are under possession of
17 the cab companies, that were unlawfully taken
18 over from individuals and titled and
19 registered in the company's name.

20 Barriers to sole proprietorship.
21 By pushing cab drivers who entered the
22 industry after 2006 into co-ownership models

1 in order to secure proper registration, the
2 District has closed the door to independent
3 operators. They cannot retain sole ownership
4 over the primary assets of their business,
5 their cabs.

6 Industry policy and practice
7 however has not fully recognized this shift.
8 As a result, these cab drivers still shoulder
9 the primary responsibilities of sole
10 proprietorship without receiving the full
11 benefits.

12 For instance, individual cab
13 drivers still carry the burden of buying or
14 financing the cars they drive. They also pay
15 taxes on their income, remain responsible for
16 costs associated with titling, and
17 subsequently reselling the car. And they pay
18 for insurance, fuel, and maintenance costs.

19 Barriers to financing newer cabs.
20 The post-2006 practice of granting a cab
21 company co-ownership of a driver owned cab
22 succeeded in part because most cab drivers own

1 the car they use as a cab outright.

2 Additionally, outright ownership
3 of cabs was possible because cab drivers
4 started to purchase older model cars that they
5 could pay for in one lump sum.

6 Taxicab regulations adopted in
7 2012 however mandate that a taxicab placed
8 into service going forward be no more than
9 five model years old. Or in the alternative,
10 not to exceed 300,000 miles.

11 While this is a big step toward
12 modernizing the taxicab industry, in practice
13 it is apt to put cab drivers into a permanent
14 debt cycle as they will likely have to finance
15 a replacement car soon after paying off the
16 initial one.

17 In the matter at hand however,
18 because newer model cars have to be financed
19 due to their price, the days of drivers paying
20 up front for the car they will use as a cab
21 are over.

22 This is because most cab companies

1 prefer not to undertake the responsibilities
2 of taxicab ownership and companies are
3 refusing to co-finance newer model cabs.

4 Even if cab drivers who entered
5 the industry after 2006 can finance a newer
6 model car on their own, it would be of little
7 benefit for the provision of taxicab service
8 as in order to register the car in DC the
9 title has to be the name of a DC resident and
10 the company name.

11 In turn, the finance company is
12 not likely to allow just anyone or even a cab
13 company to be added to the title without that
14 second party also taking on the full breadth
15 of responsibility that comes with financing a
16 car.

17 Stuck between a rock and a hard
18 place, cab drivers are willing to take
19 significant steps once again to preserve their
20 ability to continue in their profession of
21 choice. As a result some cab companies are
22 now financing cars internally in exchange for

1 being the only name on the title.

2 Meaning for some post-2006 cab
3 drivers, while they would be solely
4 responsible for the car and all that relates
5 to responsibilities of sole proprietorship,
6 the industry will continue to prevent them
7 from owning the cab outright and thereby
8 operating as a sole proprietor.

9 In conclusion, when taken together
10 these problems clearly show that
11 institutionalizing regulations and practices
12 creates insurmountable burdens to being a DC
13 cab driver who entered the industry after 2006
14 and/or who lives outside of the District.

15 Thank you.

16 COMMISSIONER COHN: Thank you,
17 gentlemen.

18 Would you like to say something?

19 MR. DESTA: No. Thank you.

20 COMMISSIONER COHN: Thank you.

21 MR. YETMGETA: Thank you.

22 COMMISSIONER COHN: I'd like to

1 welcome Commissioner Muhammad who has joined
2 us.

3 COMMISSIONER MUHAMMAD: Good
4 morning.

5 COMMISSIONER COHN: I'd like to
6 call Mr. Royale Simms please as our next
7 guest.

8 MR. SIMMS: Good morning.

9 COMMISSIONER COHN: Good morning,
10 Mr. Simms.

11 MR. SIMMS: My name is Royale
12 Simms. I'm the representative for more than
13 2,000 taxicab drivers of the Washington, DC
14 Taxi Operators Association.

15 I really had just a few points
16 that I wanted to make today to address some of
17 the concerns I have with these three pieces of
18 legislation where the two really relate,
19 Chapter 5 and Chapter 10.

20 The amendments of Chapter 5 create
21 a new Modern Taxi Association. It recognizes
22 the problem that taxi drivers have been facing

1 where they are unable to register vehicles in
2 their own name.

3 But it really doesn't address the
4 -- it seems like the goal of the MTA is to
5 create more bureaucracy without defining the
6 need for it. What is the real need of this
7 MTA?

8 The MTA is the gateway to the
9 benefits of Chapter 10. It sounds simple and
10 it requires an association to have over 100
11 drivers with 100 percent wheelchair
12 accessibility within five years.

13 But it has no teeth. It creates a
14 lot of loopholes within the legislation.

15 For instance, in the notice each
16 member of the MTA has the right to withdraw
17 from the MTA and retain the rights of
18 transferability granted by Section 10.

19 But on the very next page, the
20 right to transfer must be from a member of MTA
21 or a subsequent transferee.

22 So the question is, do you have to

1 be a member or not inside the MTA to have the
2 rights of transferability? That decision is
3 made by the DCTC.

4 What you have now is it's not
5 really a right, it's more of a privilege. The
6 transferability has to be preapproved by the
7 DCTC and that's inconsistent with giving
8 someone the right.

9 Secondly, moreover the MTA may not
10 have to exist at all to have transferability
11 under Section 504.12. If the MTA loses its
12 operating authority, all the members of the
13 MTA retain the right to transfer their vehicle
14 licenses as long as the vehicle is wheelchair
15 accessible and fuel efficient.

16 It's a huge loophole. If a
17 company -- if the MTA exists for two years and
18 all of a sudden all the members get a fuel
19 efficient vehicle and they get a tag, the MTA
20 can no longer exist and the drivers still have
21 the right to transfer that tag.

22 Section 504.12 really makes the

1 rest of Chapter 5 irrelevant.

2 If you want to incentivize
3 independent drivers to join an association,
4 buy a new car, and they quit the association
5 without losing any benefits, this chapter
6 would be the one to adopt.

7 There are simpler solutions. You
8 can simply say buy a new car, be an
9 independent driver, get it CNG and we'll give
10 you a tag. You don't have to create a new
11 association for that.

12 So that's Chapter 5 and Chapter
13 10.

14 Chapter 6, I really don't
15 understand the inconsistency in policy. Last
16 year the rules were adopted, seven years,
17 300,000 miles.

18 A little more than a year later
19 the Commission has proposed to reduce the life
20 of a gasoline vehicle by three years and
21 200,000 miles. It does this in the name of
22 fuel efficiency and wheelchair accessibility.

1 I agree wheelchair accessibility
2 is an important goal.

3 I went to the EPA website to find
4 out some stats about fuel efficiency. The
5 Argonne National Laboratory GREET Model
6 estimates the life cycle for petroleum use and
7 greenhouse gas emissions of light duty
8 vehicles running on compressed natural gas and
9 liquefied natural gas.

10 Based on this model, natural gas
11 emits approximately 6 to 11 percent lower
12 emission levels than standard gasoline
13 vehicles.

14 So you're reducing -- the
15 Commission proposes to reduce the life cycle
16 of a vehicle by three years and 200,000 miles
17 for a savings of 6 to 11 percent emissions.
18 There is no proportionality there.

19 We would really encourage the
20 Commission to stick with the standard that
21 they adopted last year of seven years.

22 That's my comments. Thank you.

1 COMMISSIONER COHN: Thank you, Mr.
2 Simms. I appreciate it.

3 Mr. Larry Frankel?

4 MR. FRANKEL: Thank you very much.
5 My name is Larry Frankel. I'm here strictly
6 as a taxicab driver with 19 years of
7 experience.

8 I just wanted to add a few
9 comments to what has already been said so it's
10 not terribly redundant. This is from the eyes
11 of me as a driver who is on the street that
12 must interpret the regulations that come out
13 of this Commission to some sort of practical
14 use on the street.

15 The problem with this is that it
16 doesn't do so very well. The good intentions
17 of this Commission do not do well because of
18 bad implementation.

19 The cost to the individual driver
20 for handicap wheel accessibility, which
21 basically would mean for most of the drivers
22 within four years, we don't -- I don't have

1 the capital to support this.

2 I have been bled by poor fares,
3 poor rates on fares for seven out of the past
4 eight years. There has been no possibility to
5 get any sort of a hold on the finances that it
6 takes to run an individual cab.

7 There have been no grants proposed
8 for private drivers and independent drivers to
9 take advantage of this. This would only
10 further push the independents out of business.

11 As a footnote I'd like to add that
12 the majority of independents right now are
13 older drivers. They do not work full time.
14 They deserve the respect of 50 years of
15 service to this city.

16 We can sit here in comfort and
17 most drivers and most individuals in this town
18 can now walk almost every ward of the city.
19 But for the majority of those years, and the
20 years that I worked also, the city was
21 incredibly dangerous.

22 We drivers, the taxicab industry,

1 helped to gentrify, helped to make the streets
2 safer. And yet our rewards are to be
3 financially hurt, to have to give up our
4 pensions.

5 I can't afford health insurance on
6 the basis of what my incomes are.

7 And the regulations that continue
8 to pancake upon each other have allowed for
9 special interests to sneak into this city and
10 take further the income that I can afford.

11 I want a brand new vehicle. I
12 want to be able to afford it. I want to be
13 able to afford to live in this city.

14 I am 61 years old. I believe that
15 almost at this point I'm inside the median age
16 of what the driver is now.

17 So what these rules actually have
18 caused is a conflict between drivers and
19 companies, and the companies to the drivers.
20 Because I need the companies too and yet what
21 you've done has been totally unfair to the
22 companies too.

1 You're willing to pull the
2 security of what's left of the security of
3 these companies away from them and give them
4 almost back to some sort of drivers that will
5 have to depend on special interests or in
6 other words, financing.

7 And then you talk about, God knows
8 what nightmare could go about. Because then
9 I'm past my street level.

10 And at my street level you must
11 pass things here for me to exist. You must
12 give me grants. You must protect me in the
13 future from promises that you've made because
14 I have not been given the promises of the past
15 eight years.

16 I think that's pretty much what
17 I'd like to say today. I thank you for the
18 opportunity to say it. Thank you.

19 COMMISSIONER COHN: Thank you, Mr.
20 Frankel. You are a young looking 61, I might
21 add.

22 MR. FRANKEL: Thank you.

1 COMMISSIONER COHN: Mr. Birbo, is
2 there a Mr. Birbo here? Gashaw?

3 MR. BIRBO: Yes.

4 COMMISSIONER COHN: Please.

5 MR. BIRBO: Good morning.

6 COMMISSIONER COHN: Good morning.

7 MR. BIRBO: My name is Gashaw
8 Birbo. I recently received my face ID after
9 I took the two-day training course to get the
10 new face ID. So this is my second time asking
11 my concern.

12 This is a request for H tag.

13 Good morning, the respective
14 Chairman and all Commissioners. I
15 participated on August 2014 Commissioners'
16 meeting and asked DCTC to reconsider the
17 decision not to issue H tag for the new, well
18 trained drivers like me by explaining the
19 facts that are going on on the ground of
20 taxicab business as follows.

21 Number one, the competition of
22 taxicab business in DC is getting tough and

1 very challenging due to the very open policy
2 that allowed many companies to operate.

3 Number two, many of the companies
4 are allowed to let their drivers compete and
5 work for themselves using their own cars even
6 though they never passed through any training
7 on cab operation business procedures.

8 Number three, the Commission
9 qualified us to be licensed cab drivers in the
10 District. But we are instructed to rent cabs
11 from driver associations that never have the
12 capacity and organizational structure to
13 provide drivable cabs for rent.

14 By paying from \$800 to \$1,200 per
15 month for cab rent, from \$20 to \$30 per week
16 for PSP service, credit card processing fee,
17 and telephone rent. Also fueling their six to
18 eight cylinder engine cars that drink fuel
19 like sports cars.

20 Because of this very fact we are
21 really sorry about the Commission's decision
22 not to give at least the opportunities that

1 other companies give to their drivers.

2 Why are we made to be used by
3 driver associations, companies that are
4 struggling hard to survive in the business?

5 If associations and their drivers
6 that own H tag are complaining and protesting
7 every day about the tough survival in the
8 business, what can be understood about us?

9 Please, we'd like to ask you to
10 reconsider the decision not to give H tag by
11 considering the above real and practical
12 facts.

13 COMMISSIONER COHN: Thank you.

14 MR. BIRBO: The other thing is
15 that because of the high amount of money that
16 we are paying to the companies every month and
17 every week, we are going home with an empty
18 pocket.

19 Yes, we are working for them. We
20 are told from 16 to 20 hours per day to help
21 and survive. So I don't know why this is
22 going on.

1 If you take the other companies
2 like Lift and Uber, I believe that's a modern
3 system and I don't have any complaint with
4 that as an individual. But the point is they
5 have full freedom. They are working and they
6 are making for them the money.

7 But in our case it is just like
8 slavery. We are just working for nothing.

9 We are paid around \$700 to get
10 good training that was designed by the DCTC.
11 We are promised that we are going to be self-
12 employed and we are to bring a change in
13 customer service in DCTC by being a devoted
14 driver. But at the end of the day what we are
15 told to do is completely different.

16 So I would like to ask if it can
17 be reconsidered and give us a chance.

18 COMMISSIONER COHN: I'd like to
19 give you an answer now but I can't, Mr. Birbo.
20 But I'll tell you one thing, you made some
21 good points.

22 Do you think you could put some

1 things in writing for us, things that you're
2 looking at?

3 MR. BIRBO: Yes. I already gave
4 it to you.

5 COMMISSIONER COHN: Oh, you
6 already did? Thank you very much. Perfect.

7 MR. BIRBO: Okay.

8 COMMISSIONER COHN: Thank you.
9 Thank you for your testimony.

10 MR. BIRBO: Thank you.

11 COMMISSIONER COHN: Mr. Addis? I
12 don't want to butcher your last name but I'm
13 going to. Gebreselassi? Is there a Mr. Addis
14 in the house?

15 Can you pronounce that, Counselor?
16 Because I can't.

17 Addis Gebreselassi?

18 PARTICIPANT: He's not here.

19 COMMISSIONER COHN: Okay. Thank
20 you, gentlemen. We are going to conclude
21 unless Mr. Muhammad has anything to say.

22 COMMISSIONER MUHAMMAD: No.

1 COMMISSIONER COHN: We are going
2 to conclude the meeting. Thank you very much
3 for your testimony.

4 We're adjourned.

5 (Whereupon, the above-entitled
6 matter was concluded at 11:00 a.m.)
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