



CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

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RINA CUTLER
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**Testimony of Charles Carmalt
Pedestrian & Bicycle Coordinator
Mayor's Office of Transportation & Utilities
Testimony on House Bill Number 1914, Session of 2009**

Good Morning and thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. My name is Charles Carmalt, and I serve as the Pedestrian & Bicycle Coordinator for the City of Philadelphia. My testimony is being presented on behalf of Deputy Mayor Rina Cutler, Transportation & Utilities.

I am here today to offer testimony on House Bill No. 1914, which would amend or supplement Title 53 by:

- Amending Section 5701 to define a "Wheelchair accessible taxicab"
- Amending Section 5717 to require that at least 50 medallions will be issued to taxicabs in Philadelphia that are wheelchair accessible
- Adding a new Section 5717.1 authorizing the Philadelphia Parking Authority to conduct a lottery to award the restricted medallions to certified drivers
- Amending Section 5720(a) to require holders of medallions to pay workers' compensation benefits to its employees

We have limited our comments to the broad issue of whether the taxicab fleet in Philadelphia should include at least 50 cabs that are wheelchair accessible. We will defer to the Philadelphia Parking Authority regarding the more technical issues involving how the medallions should be issued and regarding the more general issue of whether holders of medallions should be required to provide drivers with worker compensation benefits.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) has established a national policy that requires that services and facilities offered to the public be accessible to persons with disabilities. More broadly, ADA seeks to remove barriers that limit the ability of persons with disabilities from becoming fully functioning members of the society.

Certainly taxicabs form an important component of the transportation system in cities, especially large cities such as Philadelphia. Taxicabs could be especially valuable for persons who use wheelchairs because of mobility disabilities. However, in Philadelphia persons who use wheelchairs are unable to access that service even though their need for the service is arguably greater than the need of persons without mobility disabilities.

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We recognize that equipping all taxicabs so that they can accommodate wheelchairs would require a major turnover of the taxicab fleet. As a result, the current legislation provides a method of offering cab services to persons with disabilities at a reasonable investment cost. The efficacy of this service should be evaluated and we would hope that the number of medallions issued to accessible cabs would increase over time.

The Americans with Disabilities Act sets a national legislative policy. However, I want to stress to you that this policy is more than a legislative mandate. It encourages us to do the right thing – that is, to change the way we serve all people so that people who have disabilities can live as full a life as possible, can become as integrated into the routines of our communities as much as possible, can be as productive as possible. The ADA has enriched all of us by removing barriers. And it is important to remember that all of us will at various times during our lives suffer from disabilities and will therefore benefit from the changes that the ADA has required.

Accessible taxicabs will provide one more method of allowing persons with disabilities to participate more fully in urban life. We encourage passage of a law that fulfills this opportunity. In preparing this testimony, we consulted with staff from the Mayor's Commission on People with Disabilities and I want to let you know that that office also strongly supports legislation that would bring accessible taxicabs to the streets of Philadelphia and endorses this testimony. As indicated at the beginning of my testimony, we will defer to the Philadelphia Parking Authority regarding technical issues raised by the current bill.