

# Disability Rights Network of Pennsylvania

A merger of PP&A and the  
Disabilities Law Project

*Advancing the rights of people with disabilities*

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March 19, 2010

House Urban Affairs Committee  
302 Irvis Office Building  
P.O. Box 202181  
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2181

**RE: Comments on House Bill 1914**

To the Committee:

My name is Rocco Iacullo. I am a staff attorney at the Disability Rights Network of Pennsylvania (DRN) and I am submitting these comments on behalf of DRN. DRN is a statewide, non-profit corporation designated as the federally-mandated organization to advance and protect the civil rights of people with disabilities. DRN works to ensure that people with disabilities have equal and unhindered access to employment, transportation, public accommodations, and state and local government services. DRN appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on HB 1914 and its provisions establishing wheelchair accessible taxicab service in the Philadelphia area.

Accessible transportation is vital to enabling people with disabilities to participate as full and active members of the community. For far too long, the lack of accessible transportation options for people with disabilities has been a huge obstacle to achieving the goal of full equality. People with disabilities deserve to have the same choices of transportation that non-disabled people have. Currently, there are many students, professionals, visitors, and residents who use wheelchairs and other mobility devices that are unable to access one of the most visible and convenient modes of transportation in the city – the taxi. While others can quickly hail a cab to travel across town to a business meeting or to a court hearing or to visit area attractions, people with disabilities are completely shut out of that transportation service. It is unconscionable that some 20 years after the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act that people with disabilities can still be wholly excluded from a transportation service.

That is why DRN strongly supports the introduction of wheelchair accessible taxi service and is generally supportive of HB 1914 in its efforts to achieve that service. While DRN is generally supportive of HB 1914, DRN proposes the following changes to ensure that wheelchair accessible taxi service is implemented quickly and achieves quality service.

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First, DRN believes that there is a great demand for wheelchair accessible taxi service and therefore, §§ 5717(c) and 5717.1(a)(1) of HB1914 should be amended to increase the number of medallions to be awarded for wheelchair accessible service from 50 to 80, which would still only represent 5 % of the total 1600 medallions that are authorized to be issued by the authority.

Second, DRN is concerned that HB 1914, as currently worded, does not appear to require a winner of the lottery to present proof that they have actually purchased a wheelchair accessible taxi to the authority prior to being issued the medallion. Therefore, DRN proposes that § 5717.1 be amended to add a requirement that a winner of the medallion lottery must present proof of purchase or ownership of a wheelchair accessible vehicle within the 90 day period prior to being issued the medallion.

Third, DRN proposes that HB 1914 be amended to set forth strict requirements that the owners of the medallions maintain the lift, ramp, or other accessible equipment on the wheelchair accessible vehicle in operable condition, subject their vehicles to regular inspection by the authority, and specify strict consequences for failure to maintain such equipment in operable condition.

Fourth, DRN believes that a provision should be added that makes it clear that operators of the wheelchair accessible taxis cannot charge higher rates or fees for the provision of service to people with disabilities.

Finally, DRN believes that wheelchair accessible taxis should be subject to the same standards of quality that all other taxi cabs are subject to and, thus, DRN opposes the exemption from the age requirements granted to wheelchair accessible taxis in § 5717.1(c).

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

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