

Capitol Hill Briefing*Outlining a Path Forward on Autonomous Vehicle Legislation that Puts People First*

November 30, 2020

Good afternoon. I'm grateful for the opportunity to speak to you all today. The AV advocacy of the Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund, known as DREDF, is rooted in our belief that access to safe, affordable, reliable transportation is a civil right.

AVs have the potential to dramatically improve mobility, vehicle and road safety for the nearly 1 in 5 people in the U.S. with a disability. However, the promise and safety of AVs will only be realized if the vehicles and the surrounding infrastructure are fully accessible, and the safety elements consider the needs of *all* people with disabilities.

We know that safe and accessible AVs will be needed, and even required, when used by publicly-funded agencies, and retrofitting will be more expensive for providers in the long run. Yet, news accounts of AV testing and deployment timelines often fail to mention accessibility.^{i,ii,iii} Proposed legislation has failed to mandate accessibility and would *not* increase mobility for many people with disabilities.

Mandated standards and testing requirements must ensure the ability of all passengers, including those with physical, sensory and cognitive disabilities to locate, enter and exit the vehicle, and to communicate with the vehicle in routine and emergency situations. Standards must also ensure the safety of wheelchair users who remain in their wheelchairs, and all pedestrians and mobility device users outside the vehicle.

Safety evaluation reports must include the accessibility features of the vehicle, and whether people with disabilities were consulted as part of the design and testing. Finally, resources must be available for NHTSA and the Access Board to continue research and provide technical assistance to stakeholders to ensure fully accessible and safe service and compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

DREDF views this moment as an opportunity to reimagine mobility in line with principles of equity, sustainability, community engagement and inclusion. We call on Congress to uphold the promise of AVs to transform the transportation system for the better, and ensure access to mobility and safety for all.

ⁱ Hawkins, Andrew (September 2018). Self-driving pods are slow, boring, and weird looking – and that's a good thing, The Verge. Available at <https://www.theverge.com/2018/9/17/17859112/self-driving-cars-shuttle-podsdelivery-services>

ⁱⁱ Laris, Michael (October 2018). From Model T to driverless: Ford to launch fleet of robot cars in Washington, DC, Washington Post. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/trafficandcommuting/from-model-t-to-driverless-ford-to-launch-fleet-of-robot-cars-in-washington/2018/10/21/6d98119e-d2f6-11e8-b2d2-f397227b43f0_story.html

ⁱⁱⁱ Sage, Alexandria and Paul Lienert (November 2017). GM plans large-scale launch of self-driving cars in US Cities in 2019. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/trafficandcommuting/from-model-t-to-driverless-ford-to-launch-fleet-of-robot-cars-in-washington/2018/10/21/6d98119e-d2f6-11e8-b2d2-f397227b43f0_story.html