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Testimony of Joseph G. Rappaport, Executive Director
before the Taxi and Limousine Commission
July 23, 2019

I'm Joe Rappaport, executive director of the Brooklyn Center for Independence of the Disabled (BCID). BCID is a core member of the Taxis For All Campaign, which advocates for a fully accessible taxi and for-hire vehicle fleet.

We testify today in support of an extension of the rules governing the issuance of FHV licenses for accessible vehicles only, and in opposition to a new proposal to allow electric, non-accessible vehicles to avoid the cap on other, non-accessible vehicles.

Last year, BCID and our colleagues in the disability community strongly supported the City's decision to cap the number of FHV's, in part because we knew it wasn't an actual cap. Instead, we viewed it as a long overdue course correction – an acknowledgement by the city that for-hire vehicles have discriminated against a portion of our city's residents and visitors for years and decades. We applauded the reversal of policies that had resulted in a near-total exclusion of wheelchair users from FHV service. Ultimately, the goal should be to make FHV service available to all, as quickly and reliably as it is for everyone else.

And, according to the TLC's own data, the rules have been a modest success. As the chart below shows, there are now 749 licenses issued to wheelchair-accessible for-hire vehicles on New York City's streets, an increase of 523 from last August, when there were 226. (Only 47 of those vehicles are available to car service customers, unfortunately.)

Accessible FHV, yellow and green taxis in New York City

Category	Accessible	Non-accessible	Total vehicles	% accessible	Required
FHV	749	120,205	120,954	.6%	NA
Yellow	2,817	8,772	11,589	24.0	50% by 2020
Green	179	2,702	2,881	6.0	20%
Total	3,745	131,679	135,424	.28%	

Data supplied by New York City Taxi and Limousine Commission, July 22, 2019

But, as the chart also shows, those 749 vehicles make up only a minuscule portion of the total for-hire fleet. **Fewer than one in every 160 FHV vehicles - just . 6% - are accessible**, making it a real challenge for anyone who needs an accessible ride to actually get one. In May, a report by New York Lawyers for the Public Interest, [Still Left Behind](#), documented how Uber and Lyft's accessible service still is poor, with longer waits than other riders encounter and, in many cases, no service at all.

In other words, you have a very long way to go to get anything close to the equivalent level of service the TLC's own regulations requires. We urge you to make the mandate permanent, or to extend it to five or 10 years at the least, and to allow the addition the addition of accessible licenses and vehicles only. Only then will the severe imbalance in service finally be corrected. We are willing to work with you to pass new City law to codify a permanent or long-term policy allowing only new accessible FHV licenses, if necessary.

The chart also shows that you are not close to meeting the terms of an agreement you signed with the Taxis For All Campaign, including my organization, about the number of accessible yellow taxis on the road, and are far off the 20% accessibility requirement for green cabs. We urge you to work quickly to reverse this.

With the tremendous disparity in service in mind, we oppose the proposal to allow any new, non-accessible vehicles on the road. We're breathing the same air as everyone else, of course, so we want less-polluting vehicles. But the proposal to allow non-accessible electric FHV vehicles is counter to the City and this proposal's stated goal of reducing congestion. As the proposal notes, "traffic congestion in New York City has grown steadily worse since 2010, with travel speeds in Midtown Manhattan dropping to 4.3 mph during November and December 2018."

With nearly 121,000 FHVs on the road now - most of them non-accessible - why would the TLC contemplate adding more non-accessible vehicles anytime soon, whether they are lower-polluting or not?

Unfortunately, that's precisely what this proposal does, in allowing non-accessible electric vehicles an exemption as well. An electric vehicle still means more traffic and more congestion. And it increases the accessibility disparity. It just doesn't make sense.

The TLC can play lead role in encouraging the development of an electric, accessible for-hire vehicle. We have no doubt that the innovation that automobile manufacturers have brought to the electric vehicle sector also can be applied to accessibility, if encouraged by governmental regulations.

We urge you to reject this new part of the proposal. Thank you.