



May 11, 2021

The Honorable Maria Cantwell
Chair
United States Senate Committee on
Commerce, Science, & Transportation
511 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roger Wicker
Ranking Member
United States Senate Committee on
Commerce, Science, & Transportation
555 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Cantwell and Ranking Member Wicker:

The National Federation of the Blind, the nation's transformative civil rights organization of the blind, supports and endorses the amendment to the Endless Frontier Act filed with the committee by Senator Thune on May 10, 2021. Specifically, we support the portions of the amendment that will create an exemption classification for manufacturers who provide transportation access for people with disabilities and prohibit discriminatory licensing practices for highly automated vehicles.

Subsection (d)(2)(C) of the amendment would create an exemption category under the federal motor vehicle safety standards located in Section 30113 of title 49 United States Code that would "provide transportation access for individuals with disabilities, including non-visual access for individuals who are blind or visually impaired." This addition to the law will provide the incentive needed for automobile manufacturers to ensure that the unique requirements for Americans with disabilities to be able to operate automated vehicles are considered in the early stages of development.

Subsection (e)(3) of the amendment would mandate that a state "may not issue a motor vehicle operator's license for the operation or use of a highly automated vehicle in a manner that discriminates on the basis of disability." This will ensure that current requirements necessary to obtain a driver's license, like a vision test, will not be required in order to operate or use a highly automated vehicle. We are pleased to see this subsection included in the

amendment because highly automated vehicles will pilot themselves (SAE Level 4 and Level 5), making a vision requirement arbitrary and discriminatory.

Highly automated vehicles have the potential to revolutionize the transportation landscape, especially for individuals with disabilities. However, those same individuals with disabilities who stand to gain the most from the creation and proliferation of highly automated vehicles could be left out of this new frontier if specific actions are not taken. Senator Thune's amendment to the Endless Frontier Act is an important step to ensure that America's journey toward automotive automation is fully inclusive of those who will benefit most.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark A. Riccobono". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Mark A. Riccobono, President
National Federation of the Blind