

Dear Chair Abney and Honorable members of the Committee,

My name is Kenny Uong, I live in Providence, and I am writing in support of Representative Stewart's Bill H8145, which would allocate the current 7% sales tax on Uber and Lyft rides to fund RIPTA's Paratransit and Ride Anywhere programs.

In addition to being a transit rider and advocate, I am also a caregiver of parents who are stroke survivors. Both of them rely on RIPTA paratransit service to get to their medical appointments. Overall, paratransit service has been very helpful for us but we've been experiencing less flexibility in scheduling trips from time to time. At times, the wait for the vehicle was so long that we were forced to cancel the trip and call a Lyft.

Last year, the General Assembly passed the FY '26 budget with language stating that paratransit services would not face any cuts, and that the one-year Ride Anywhere pilot, which expands paratransit service statewide, would be made permanent. However, no additional funding was allocated to support these programs, despite skyrocketing demand driven by cuts to the fixed-route system, an expanded service area, and an aging population.

Demand for paratransit has grown so significantly that RIPTA has been forced to rely on costly private taxi services to supplement its own vehicles and drivers. Simultaneously, riders are experiencing longer wait times and a decline in customer service.

I urge you to support this legislation to strengthen mobility for people with disabilities across our state by redirecting the existing sales tax collected from rides taken on Uber and Lyft, companies that actively draw ridership away from public transit. This approach would help stabilize RIPTA's finances while supporting the long-term sustainability and improvement of statewide paratransit services for all Rhode Islanders who rely on them.

Thank you,

Kenny Uong

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