

Hello. My name is Amelia Winnard and I'm 25 years old and a disabled recreation therapist residing in Alexandria, VA. I urge you to support the bill to study transportation options for disabled people in Virginia. Transportation affects every aspect of our lives and for disabled people who do not drive, like me, transportation affects our access to equal opportunities for employment, housing, medical services, and social and recreation resources. In most communities in Virginia, there are few transportation options for disabled people, limiting our independence.

In college, I studied recreation therapy at Longwood University in Farmville, Virginia. Due to the lack of transportation into the surrounding rural communities there, I was unable to complete my field work and had to leave the university. I transferred to George Mason University in Fairfax where there are limited transportation options for disabled people. In Northern Virginia, including Fairfax, we have Metro Access, but I am here to tell you that we do need to study and document the problems with this service for disabled commuters. Metro Access has a multitude of issues with scheduling, timeliness, availability, and safety and security of passengers.

Now, I work as a recreation therapist with a nonprofit I co-founded for adults with physical disabilities, Pursuit Adaptive Sports and Recreation, and the number one issue that we hear from our members who want to participate in activities but are unable to do so, is lack of transportation. Even in Northern Virginia, Metro Access only serves Arlington and Fairfax counties and the cities of Alexandria, Fairfax, and Falls Church. Metro Access is not an option for traveling to Prince William or Loudoun counties.

A lack of transportation options for the disabled in the Commonwealth impacts our ability to meet our basic human needs including employment, housing, medical, social and recreation. Lack of transportation for the disabled population is a human rights issue and an equity issue. 31 years after signing the ADA into law, the Commonwealth of Virginia is still not addressing an essential need for transportation for the disabled to allow equity for all. Please support this first step - the bill to study transportation needs for our disabled population -so that we can together work on solutions to address equity for all. Do assist us in gaining our freedom to be independent and thrive.

Thank you.

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