



MINNESOTA ASSOCIATION OF
AREA AGENCIES ON AGING

March 15, 2021

Representative Frank Hornstein, Chair
Transportation Finance and Policy Committee
Minnesota House of Representatives
509 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

RE: House File 586 – Volunteer Driver Definition

Dear Chair Hornstein and Members of the Committee:

Minnesota's Area Agencies on Aging urge passage of House File 586 (Murphy) as amended by the author. These changes in statute are necessary to help ensure that the volunteer driver programs present throughout the state can continue to provide rides to older adults for healthcare and other services. Many older adults are no longer able to drive, often for many years, and they depend on volunteer drivers to maintain health and well-being.

Unfortunately, volunteer drivers are not defined in law and vehicle insurance companies pressure volunteers to pay higher premiums, asserting they are drivers-for-hire such as taxi drivers and Uber and Lyft drivers. Without changing current law, this practice will continue, making it increasingly difficult to recruit and retain volunteer drivers, just as our older adult population grows exponentially.

HF 586 will protect and strengthen volunteer driver programs and help to ensure that volunteers can continue to transport older adults and people with disabilities to medical appointments and community services across Minnesota. In the most recent survey of the **Volunteer Driver Coalition (www.volunteerdrivermn.org)**, represented by more than **80 nonprofit and local government programs**, the Coalition reported providing more than **168,000 trips annually, serving 77,000 people**. We cannot afford to lose volunteer drivers. They are an essential segment of the transportation infrastructure.

Volunteer drivers contribute their time and use their own vehicles to provide rides. The organizations that sponsor them require that their volunteers are trained to provide safe rides in safe vehicles. Volunteers help frail older adults and others who have functional or cognitive limitations by providing door-through-door access to medical care and to community supports and services.

Volunteer driver programs must be viable and thrive for the essential role they play in giving older adults access to healthcare and to the broader community. These programs help to ensure equitable access to medical care, reduce isolation and provide safe rides. In some communities in greater Minnesota, these programs are the only option for transportation services.

Minnesota's seven area agencies on aging know well the transportation and other needs of older adults. We fund community-based organizations to provide meals, chore service, transportation, caregiver respite and other services to help older adults live with dignity and independence in their homes. We work in partnership with the MN Board on Aging and provide the Senior LinkAge Line information and assistance service connecting older adults to services, housing options and Medicare consultation.

Thank you for supporting older adults in communities across Minnesota.

Sincerely,



Kristi Kane, Director, Arrowhead Area Agency on Aging



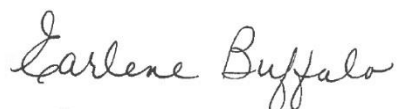
Lori Vrolson, Executive Director, Central Minnesota Council on Aging



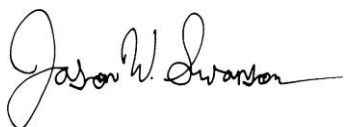
Darla Waldner, Director, Dancing Sky Area Agency on Aging



Dawn Simonson, Executive Director, Metropolitan Area Agency on Aging



Earlene Buffalo, Director, Minnesota Indian Area Agency on Aging



Jason Swanson, Executive Director, Minnesota River Area Agency on Aging



Laurie Brownell, Director, Southeastern Minnesota Area Agency on Aging