



## STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

**DIVISION OF PUBLIC UTILITIES & CARRIERS**  
Administration  
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April 8, 2025

The Honorable Joseph J. Solomon, Jr.  
Chairman - House Corporations Committee  
State House  
Providence, R.I. 02903

Re: **H-5546 Public Utilities - For-hire drivers background checks**

Dear Chairman Solomon:

The Division of Public Utilities and Carriers ("Division") writes in support of H-5546 which was introduced at the Division's request. This measure requires nationwide, fingerprint-based background checks on all for-hire drivers transporting passengers within Rhode Island. The Division has updated and modified the language in this bill, from prior iterations, to ensure it complies with both the intent and the letter of the 2020 Fair Chance Act.

This proposal addresses the Division's long-held concerns regarding the vetting of intrastate for-hire drivers - including taxicabs, limousines, transportation network companies ("TNCs") such as Uber and Lyft, and, more recently, Non-Emergency Medical Transportation ("NEMT") services. Indeed, for many years the Division has championed similar versions of this bill that would require nationwide biometric (fingerprint) background checks for all for-hire drivers in Rhode Island. The addition during the last legislative session of NEMT services to the state's transportation arenas further necessitates this bill's passage.

Moreover, these measures are equally needed in the TNC arena, where R.I. Gen Laws §39-14.2 et seq. delegates driver-vetting to Uber and Lyft or other commercial enterprises. Enacting this law will place Rhode Island on equal footing with Massachusetts, which, for eight years now, has required TNC drivers to pass a secondary background check conducted and reviewed by the TNC Division of the Massachusetts Department of Public Utilities (and not just by the TNC company itself).

The use of this secondary background check system has yielded significant and startling results in neighboring Massachusetts. Soon after the Mass. DPU began its oversight in 2017 twelve percent of the roughly 150,000 drivers presented by TNCs as having passed the companies' internal checks, were rejected through this secondary background check. In 2018, the number of rejected drivers climbed to fifteen percent (or approximately 30,000) of the 220,000 drivers "cleared" by commercial operators. The 2018 data (published in mid- 2019) is the most recent available from the Massachusetts DPU, but it offers a reliable snapshot of the increased protections that would be provided to travelling Rhode Islanders.

The reasons for rejection of those thousands of drivers ranged from the age of the prospective driver (too young), possessing an invalid/suspended driver's license, multiple driving offenses, and multiple convictions for violent crimes. Nearly 1,000 drivers were rejected for sex crime convictions or because they are registered sex offenders; yet, they passed the background checks conducted by commercial providers. For purposes of comparison, Lyft has on file with the Division 17,403 "cleared" drivers as of last month; a rejection rate of just twelve percent (as seen in the first year in Massachusetts) would translate to slightly more than 2,000 unqualified and possibly dangerous drivers transporting Rhode Island citizens.

The Division will remain vigilant in striving to protect public safety for all paying passengers within the current statutory framework for such transportation providers but seeks the General Assembly's assistance to provide the additional protections afforded by H-5546. Traveling Rhode Islanders deserve all the physical protections, as well as peace of mind, that we can provide when they climb into a taxicab, limousine, NEMT vehicle, or TNC vehicle.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Linda George".

Linda George, Esq.  
Administrator, RI Division of Public Utilities and Carriers

Cc. The Honorable Rep. Arthur J. Corvese  
The Honorable Members of the House Committee on Corporations  
Nicole McCarty, Esq., Chief Legal Counsel