

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
DEPARTMENT OF FOR-HIRE VEHICLES



Fiscal Year 2020
Performance Oversight Hearing

Testimony of
David Do
Director

Before the
Committee on Business and Economic Development
Council of the District of Columbia
The Honorable Kenyan McDuffie, Chairperson

John A. Wilson Building
Room 500
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004
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9:00 AM

Good morning, Chairperson McDuffie, members of the Committee, and staff. I am David Do, and I am the Director of the Department of For-Hire Vehicles. I appreciate this opportunity to testify on behalf of Mayor Muriel Bowser on the agency's performance in Fiscal Year 2020. But before I begin, I want to first thank the for-hire industry for their dedication and commitment in providing critical transportation and delivery services during the Public Health Emergency that started in Fiscal Year 2020. Both the livelihoods of drivers and companies are on the line, and our drivers are front-line workers who face the potential of COVID-19 exposure on a daily basis. We lost several drivers to COVID-19 this year and we wish to honor them today with this testimony. In addition, I thank my team at DFHV who are working non-stop and staying nimble to meet the challenges from this ongoing Public Health Emergency (PHE).

Mayor Bowser's Fiscal Year 2020 budget made investments that supported our goal to deliver on the promise of providing a Fair Shot. These efforts included ensuring transportation equity and accessibility, protecting the safety of the riding public, creating economic opportunity, and providing effective and efficient government services to our residents, visitors and the for-hire industry.



In Fiscal Year 2020, DFHV had three strategic objectives to improve for-hire transportation for residents, visitors and the industry:

- 1) Ensure passengers have safe and excellent riding experiences.
- 2) Expand business opportunities and maintain economic viability within the for-hire industry; and
- 3) Create and maintain a highly efficient, transparent, and responsive District government.

At the conclusion of FY 2020, we met or exceeded the key performance indicator measures in our performance plan and fulfilled all our strategic initiatives. DFHV also met and exceeded our SBE Spend Goals with Small Business Enterprises (SBE), ensuring we keep local dollars local whenever possible. In FY20, DFHV surpassed our goal by 133% by spending \$8.7M on small businesses.

This past fiscal year introduced challenges in the for-hire vehicle industry on a scale and duration never before experienced or even contemplated. Since March 2020, the demand for for-hire rides dropped dramatically and has remained persistently low. In the taxi industry, rides are still only about 10% of what they were a year ago.



In response to the Public Health Emergency, DFHV worked tirelessly alongside the industry and our stakeholders to pivot and adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic. Our work during this past year prioritized the safety of our drivers and the riding public, we delivered safe and efficient transportation to the public, and we helped our drivers with guidance and relief to get through these challenging times.

I am very proud that our industry showed resiliency and stepped up to support the District's efforts with essential transportation. Together we:

- Delivered daily meals and monthly groceries for older adults;
- Delivered 800 boxes of PPE to dentists across the District;
- Provided over 30,000 essential trips through DFHV's expanded Taxi-2-Rail program;
- Provided over 1,300 trips to hospital workers on late shifts; and
- DFHV continues to provide 24/7 service for Transport DC, which has provided critical support for residents with disabilities and over 130,000 rides since the start of the public health emergency.



Some of the key actions DFHV took to protect drivers and the public during the public health emergency include:

- Shared information with drivers on how to protect themselves and passengers, hosted a Taxi Tele-Townhall attended by over 250 operators, and added a driver resource page to our website with information on unemployment benefits and other resources available to help them during the pandemic.
- Distributed 1,000 free safety barriers to taxi drivers to help prevent the spread of disease between the front and back seats. Decals were distributed to these vehicles to alert the public about the added protections. This was coupled with a digital Ride Safe Campaign to re-enforce safety protocols.

DFHV also provided flexibility to the industry by providing regulatory relief including:

- Extended the vehicle age limit permanently from eight years to ten years.
- Clarified that taxi vehicles can deliver food and packages to provide more opportunities for drivers
- Automatically extended the expiration dates of Face IDs, renewals and vehicle registrations and delayed fee collection.



- Promoted the Mayor's Microgrant program which resulted in over 445 taxi drivers receiving \$1,000 awards and five (5) companies receiving over a total of \$27,000 in much needed support.
- Last but not the least, DFHV launched the Operator Wellness Project where DFHV's Office of Consumer Complaints engages in daily calls to taxi operators to inquire about their wellbeing and provide information on available resources. DFHV has reached over 1,300 operators since August 2020 and received overwhelmingly positive feedback.

In FY 2021, DFHV will award up to \$6.3 million in grants to expand business opportunities and create innovative programs to support transportation equity. The agency's program portfolio provides additional transportation options for people with disabilities, connects low-income veterans with rides to health care and employment, offers safe rides to and from school for foster children and will also soon give rides to residents in need of opioid abuse treatment. Equally important, DFHV programs address transportation inequities which can result from systemic racism -- another key theme from FY2020 -- as our programs provide vital transportation to residents East of the River and give options to the unbanked, communities of color, and veterans.



Many of our Transport DC users live East of River are African American, live below the poverty line, and are over the age of 60. While the program's sustainability has been an on-going challenge, DFHV is committed to maintaining the program's budget integrity. My team and I will continue to examine innovative solutions that offer customers choice and efficiency which can sustain the program through this fiscal year and beyond while continuing to make an impact for those who need it most.

I want to congratulate you Councilmember McDuffie on the Racial Equity Achieves Results Act. DFHV is aligned with this initiative and the Mayor's efforts on addressing systemic racism. DFHV is working diligently to increase the understanding of racial equity, complying with the Act, to ensure our DFHV leadership team and employees receive racial equity training. We will continue to work closely with the for-hire industry to serve all residents of the District, regardless of race or where they live.

The other priorities for DFHV in FY2021 are Recovery and Innovation. The for-hire industry is in great need of recovery – and my team and I will find opportunities to encourage industry diversification and innovation. We believe



leveraging technology can help keep the industry nimble and responsive. Offering economic opportunities to the industry through DFHV programs that serve vulnerable populations is a win-win for the District. We continue our commitment to ensuring and incentivizing wheelchair accessible services to support our 248 WAV taxis and those who need them. Engagement and outreach with both our industry and the riding public remains front and center and is particularly important during these uncertain times.

We will conduct forums with the industry, engage our various committees and user groups, and use social media platforms to broaden our reach. DFHV will use every resource to inform, educate, and collect feedback on how we can help the industry effectively and efficiently serve the District’s transportation needs. Also, we will continue to collaborate with District agencies and other regulators to gain insights on policy and best practices, and further our industry recovery plan to build back better.

Speaking of collaboration, I want to thank the For-Hire Vehicle Advisory Council (FHVAC) for their dedication, input, and support this year. Chairperson Linwood Jolly has been a strong and steady leader during the Public Health Emergency – a time when our industry has been decimated and yet never more



essential. Additionally, one of our FHVAC members, Advisor Dawit Dagneu, has been recognized by the International Association of Taxi Regulators as the 2020 Driver of the Year for his work during the pandemic helping fellow drivers in receiving Microgrants and Pandemic Unemployment Assistance.

I am truly honored and appreciative of this opportunity to serve the District with a great team and supportive community in one of the most challenging periods of our lifetimes. With the guidance of Mayor Bowser, this agency will continue to work closely with the Council and this Committee. In closing, I am grateful for your support, pleased to share our accomplishments, and offer my plans for the remainder of Fiscal Year 2021. My team and I are happy to address any questions you may have.

