



MINNESOTA PUBLIC TRANSIT ASSOCIATION

March 8, 2021

House Committee on Commerce, Finance and Policy Members

RE: Support Volunteer Driver Definition - HF 586/Murphy as amended by the author

Volunteer drivers have supplemented rural public transit programs for decades. Community members who care about serving their neighbors allow many people in more rural areas to remain in their communities despite transportation barriers to needed medical and other services. Volunteers donate their time and receive a reimbursement rate to ensure they are able to maintain safely operating vehicles. This is the ideal solution for many transit systems that simply can't meet all of the requests for trips made by residents in their communities.

Unfortunately, with the advent of new services by people using their own vehicles, volunteer drivers who work with local transit systems have found themselves treated as "for hire" drivers instead of people who simply want to give a neighbor a ride. The lack of clarity in defining a volunteer driver has led to increased costs and challenges for our volunteer drivers. Many of these volunteers are retired people who can't afford increased insurance costs or additional tax burdens.

Many transit systems around the state rely on volunteers to serve the needs of community members; needs that the transit system cannot address due to the length of the trip or the lack of buses and drivers. Systems such as Arrowhead Transit, Brown County Transit, Central Community Transit, United Community Action Partnership, Paul Bunyan Transit, Prairie Five Rides, Rainbow Rider, Trailblazer Transit, Tri-Cap Transit Connection, TRUE Transit and Wadena County Friendly Rider benefit from thousands of hours and thousands of miles of donated service from volunteer drivers every year. The cost of providing these trips through public transit is prohibitive. The volunteer driver program is a huge bargain for the state.

The cost for taxpayers to replace this valuable volunteer work is high. Example: For a volunteer to drive from Willmar to Saint Cloud at the business mileage reimbursement rate the cost is approximately \$74. The same trip provided by a private carrier could easily cost over \$350.00. This cost increase would be felt throughout the system.

State legislators must take action to protect our volunteer drivers from financial burdens for doing the right thing, and assure that our citizens have access to this low-cost and efficient travel option.

Please support HF586 and clarify the definition of a volunteer driver before we lose more of our valuable volunteers.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ryan I Daniel".

Ryan Daniel, St. Cloud Metro Bus
MPTA President