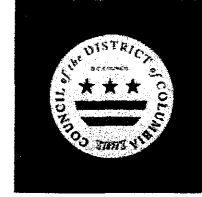




DFHV

Government of the District of Columbia
Department of For-Hire Vehicles



VLA TESTIMONY Regarding DC Department of For-Hire Vehicles

Philip S. Jagiela

Executive Director of the Virginia Limousine Association (VLA)

Thank you, Councilmember Chair Kenyan McDuffie and fellow council members, of the Committee on Business and Economic Development for allowing us the opportunity to participate in the discussion of the Performance Oversight of the D.C. Department of For-Hires Vehicles. My name is Philip Jagiela and I serve at the Executive Director for the Virginia Limousine Association. Our operator members have operating authority granted by the VA Department of Motor Vehicles CPC, Federal Department of Transportation. Our operators have a mixed fleet of vehicles that range from luxury sedans, Executive vans, SUV's, mini-coach and motor-coach units that currently number more than 1000 units. Our operators employ operations, chauffeur and support staff of over 1600 people. We are members of the National Limousine Association and other local business associations in and those surrounding the District.

Today, I am here on the behalf of the Virginia Limousine Association (VLA). The VLA was founded in 1987 for trade advocacy, promote the highest levels for service and integrity within the chauffeured transportation industry and professional relationships with regulatory and legislative representatives. VLA members serve the public interest through best practices, regulatory compliance and philanthropic endeavors. Members include several of the most acclaimed operators in the nation. The association was recently recognized with the Association of Excellence award by Limousine, Charter and Tours magazine during an international conference held in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Some facts about the VLA:

- We represent member operators from around the state as well as those who are based in Maryland.
- Member companies range in size from the single vehicle operation to companies who have a mixed fleet of equipment and number over two hundred and fifty vehicles
- Member companies are domiciled within the State and from across the country
- Member companies are private and publically owned with the largest percentage being owner/operator structured companies
- All members have VA DMV Certificate of Public Convenience granted authority to operate within the State
- Most members have Federal Department of Transportation Authority to operate across state lines
- Gross revenues range from \$50k to several million dollars per year

- Members are all considered small businesses as they have under 500 people in their employ
- Members employ staffs from within their own specific geographic region which would include: Office staff- reservationist, dispatch, accounting, human resource, chauffeurs and vehicle maintenance personnel
- Members utilize the services and products of local vendors including insurance, vehicle sales, vehicle maintenance shops, car wash, body shops and banks

Why are we here?

To share our experiences with the DC Department of For-Hire Vehicles

Department of For-Hire Vehicles

Background:

In August of 2016, the VLA contacted the Department of For-Hire Vehicles requesting an opportunity to meet with the agency to initially address the mechanics of the upcoming inauguration to understand what impact this would have on our association members. In conjunction, we desired to build a professional relationship with the agency. Our request was initially addressed by Ms. Juanda Mixon, Executive Assistant to the Director. Ms. Mixon was/is the epitome of professionalism who explained the agency had recently underwent a major change, June 28, 2016, and installed a new Director, A conference call was orchestrated between myself and Director Ernest Chrappah. During that call, Director Chrappah indicated he too shared a mutual desire to meet with industry stakeholders. We explained we wanted to understand the position of the Agency related to an equitable business model between the Transportation Network Companies (TNCs) and the chauffeured car industry. Subsequently, a meeting between the Director and a core group of VLA leaders was arranged. On September 19, 2016 a meeting was held at the agency corporate office. At this meeting, we shared background on who the VLA is and the agency explained what their purpose is, what had necessitated the change on June of 2016 along with their vision for the future. Our summary of this meeting has been attached for your review. We were very impressed with the efficiencies, candid open dialogue and willingness to provide paths for reciprocity to our members. This was a major initiative that bode well for the beginning stages of a professional business relationship between both parties. To be noted, this relationship is unique for our industry and reflective of what we have experienced since our initial meeting. Under the Director's leadership, we have worked with key staff members and extended invitations to Neville Waters, Public Information Officer, and Chief Enforcement Officer Dennis Starks. Waters accepted the offer to be our keynote speaker during an annual meeting held at an industry trade show on October 12, 2016 held in Washington, D. C. This event was well attended and allowed industry members from around the globe to view the relationship between regulatory agencies and our industry. Comments made by attendees confirmed what we had experienced: a unique, professional, mutually beneficial business relationship and an environment to have our concerns heard to provide a positive resolution. Starks participated in a General Membership meeting April 3, 2017 with a presentation of the agencies role related to enforcement. This was an open forum meeting as he wanted to know how the relationship has been, and what could be done to improve.

This willingness to work with our industry, communicate effectively and allow for questions to be heard and addressed has done much to not only enhance the image of the agency, but most importantly work with our association while providing for the greater benefit of District travelers. Director Chrappah is a visionary for the transportation industry who works well with stakeholders to make his vision a reality. This is something our association is grateful for and continuously enhance this relationship and seek to be a large part of the success now and in the future.

Highlights

- VLA request for in-person meeting accepted and held one month from request
- Background information shared by both organizations
- Initial meeting laid the ground work for cooperative business relationship
- Inaugural information and assistance provided
 - Direct contact made with Chief Enforcement Officer, Dennis Starks
 - Conference call held with association members and Mr. Starks
 - Total process reviewed with instructions on how to make the event a success
 - Permitting process provided
- Operating reciprocity between neighboring states and DFHV granted
 - Created App based program to allow out of district members to have operating authority within District
- Open dialogue between departments within the agency
- Agency indicated their desire to work directly with the VLA leadership
- Keynote invitation accepted by Neville Waters with presentation of “Who We Are- What We Do”
- Keynote invitation accepted by Dennis Starks to attend bi-monthly membership meeting April 2017
 - Open forum to understand how relationship is working
 - Offer made for members to directly contact with any enforcement challenges
 - Website updated to include all relevant information to operate within District
 - Website updated to include “Complaints”
- Agency provides regular communications to our office for distribution to our members
- Agency initiated (May 31, 2017) both in-person, Town Hall Meetings and Tele-Town Hall to hear any concerns, challenges and success the industry, or riding public, has experienced
- Podcasts initiated with guide to resources within and outside the DFHV
- Pre-emptive communications are made to our association on frequent and regular basis
- Rules are consistent and offer parity between all transportation providers

Where are we today?

We are most appreciative and grateful for the new direction, efforts and success we have experienced while working with Director Chrappah and his team of professionals since September 2016. With anything new, this is a work in progress and prone to some room for improvement in certain areas. We would like to take this time to share some successes, concerns, and suggestions, to consider for continued success.

Successes and Room for Improvement Suggestions- Input From Members

- **Successes**
- “The overall experience with the new DFHV has been **GREAT.**”
 - “We have rules and regulations that we can work with AND they are consistent”
- “Their App works well”
- “Enforcement officers are a 100% improvement compared to the previous agency”
- “The fact that the DFHV invited us to “partner” with them is tremendous benefit for our association members”, “The previous agency would not return calls, answer phone messages or provide any form of guidance”
- “The office staff? **WOW!** Thorough, professional and informed.”
 - “We recently had disagreement with hack inspector when he indicated our vehicle was not registered. Ordinarily this would have resulted in a long, loud unfriendly telephone call. It was resolved professionally and calmly within ten minutes, including a call to the inspector to bring him up to date”
- “Looking forward to working with the DFHV in the future”
- “Have had no issues working with DFHV”
- “Thankful to the association for willingness to develop a business relationship with the DFHV and grateful for the agency willing to work with us”
- “Allows us to legally operate within the district without additional operating submission application”

Room for Improvement

- Enforcement continues to provide the greatest challenge
 - This comment has been reported numerous times as it has a significant financial impact on those who have been cited for various “infractions”
 - If stopped, it has caused challenges when a client is in the vehicle. On occasion causing a delay in the travel needs
 - Communications appear to not flow to officers on the street
- APP usage challenges
 - Company utilizes their own app, driver forgets to log into DFHV app
 - Automatic penalties/fines applied to driver AND company
 - Appear to be no “warnings” issued for first time offense
- District Operating privilege sticker
 - Does not display expiration date
 - No notification sent for renewal
 - Penalties/fines imposed on company
- Pilot Program

- Will permanent policy be instituted and if so, when?
- Loitering violations
 - Union Station offers no “staging area” or temporary parking options
 - Officers are quick to issue expensive citations

Closing remarks

As indicated in our testimony made here today, we have experienced a greatly improved, productive and professional business relationship. Comments made by some of our operator companies share the same belief. Clearly the “success” outweigh the room for improvement” and with this opportunity to make their concern known, we look forward to working for the mutual good for not only our respective organizations, but also to part a part of the evolving transportation plans of the future.

Thank you for allowing us this opportunity to speak with you today, and should there be any questions for me, I would be glad to provide any clarity or answers for you.

**Respectfully yours,
Philip S. Jagiela
Virginia Limousine Association
Executive Director**