October 15, 2021

Dear (*Senator or Representative*):

In honor of the National White Cane Safety Day, I am reaching out to you for assistance with the dissolution of TD Tampa Bay, a transportation service in which I was a consumer. This line item, although small in comparison in the FDOT budget was eliminated. The program is still there but was not funded. It is no longer available to not only me but others with disabilities.

Affordable and safe transportation is necessary for the people of Florida, especially those of us with disabilities. Support from all over the state is needed to reinstate the funding for the TD Tampa Bay service.

My name is Deborah Malone, and I am a current legally blind resident of Hillsborough County, previously of Pasco County.

As you may or may not be aware, TD Tampa Bay which is a safe, multi-county door to door transportation service for the disabled, was discontinued July 1, 2021 through a line item veto by Governor DeSantis. This was serviced by USURV in Manatee, Pinellas, Hillsborough, Pasco, and Hernando Counties. Riders were charged $6.00 per trip between counties. Senate Bill 100 and Senate Bill 1126 also repealed the funding for M-CORES of which TD Tampa Bay received its funding grant.

I learned of this service in December of 2020, and it vastly opened my ability to have complete social independence to get to various parts of the Tampa Bay area. Prior to TD Tampa Bay, my work opportunities and social activities were extremely limited. After my move to Tampa, my transportation options increased. However, I obtained a job at the Strawberry Festival in February 2021. My only transportation option was TD Tampa Bay.

TD Tampa Bay also afforded me and others with visual impairments the opportunity to meet other blind friends for social gatherings in mutually central locations throughout the Tampa Bay area at an affordable cost. Uber and Lyft are much too expensive.

Because of TD Tampa Bay I was able to go to the beach. I had been unable to secure transportation to the beach for over 2 years. Also, TD Tampa Bay allowed me the freedom to attend festivals, shop, and enjoy Florida’s amenities that I could otherwise not enjoy.

I am requesting your support to assist in advocating and locating the funds to reinstate this beneficial program as it not only enhanced the life of those who used it, but the businesses in Manatee, Pinellas, Hillsborough, Pasco, and Hernando counties. Traditionally, those who are sight impaired or have cognitive or physical disabilities which do not allow them to drive have limited income or earn considerably less than those who are not disabled. TD Tampa Bay afforded us a reasonable cost for transportation throughout the five counties to increase employment options for those with disabilities AND increased the amount of discretionary income to spend at the various businesses we frequent for lunches and shopping due to the availability and low cost or transportation. Everyone benefited, the local economy, the increase of employees for businesses and those of us with disabilities to participate more fully economically and socially.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to hearing how you can support reestablishing TD Tampa Bay transportation option, as a safe, valuable resource for people with disabilities.

Sincerely,

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