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Assembly Transportation Committee

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Good morning Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, my name is Eric Blomgren and I am here representing the New Jersey Gasoline, Convenience Store, and Automotive Association (NJGCA). Our membership includes many of the thousands of independent auto repair businesses in New Jersey. These are some of America's quintessential small businesses and I thank you for the opportunity to testify on their behalf today.

While I am not here to comment on most of the provisions relating to this issue, there is one area that is worthy of praise: the requirement of safety inspections for these transportation network vehicles. Any bill that will increase road safety through the greater use of safety inspections is one that will be enthusiastically supported by the small businesses we represent. It is the independent auto repairers who will often be the ones tasked with conducting these safety inspections and with making the repairs needed to ensure compliance; a service they are happy to provide.

Since mandatory safety inspections for passenger vehicles were eliminated over four years ago, our members have consistently reported seeing a dramatic increase in the number of motorists coming in for repairs or oil changes with nonworking lamps, lighting devices, thin tires, and/or other safety violations.

In the past, most motorists would have asked their mechanic to make the necessary fixes so that they could pass their next safety inspection. However, now that there is no fear of failing a safety inspection, many motorists are content to ignore the problem and save their money. This of course leads to more dangerous roads for all of us.

In addition to increasing road safety, this bill will also provide some help for the state's independent auto repairers. Over the course of the last decade, they have felt themselves being squeezed out of the business by the big auto corporations who have been trying to use advances

in technology to force motorists to have their repairs done at dealerships. The loss of business they have suffered as a result of motorists ignoring their unsafe vehicles is a pain that they readily bring up in conversations about the state of their business, even after four years.

The cost to the owner of a vehicle for a safety inspection will be minimal, and well worth the savings they will generate. Not only will they be less likely to be involved in a costly accident, they also will not have to worry about traffic tickets related to these problems. While regular safety inspections for passenger vehicles are no longer required, everything the inspection checked for is still required to be maintained in working order by state statutes.

In fact I would anticipate many businesses offering a safety inspection at a discounted cost or even at no cost as a way to incentivize the owner to have their repairs fixed at that business.

When mandatory safety inspections were eliminated for passenger vehicles, they were maintained for commercial vehicles like taxis and limousines; and with good reason. Commercial vehicles are on the road more and experience more wear and tear than almost any passenger vehicle. In fact, commercial vehicles are required to be inspected for safety **every** year, rather than every other year as called for in the current language.

This is one area where we feel there could be improvement to this proposal. If the language becomes law as it currently is written, then these transportation network vehicles will be the only type of vehicle on the road which must undergo a safety inspection every other year. Taxis and limos will still be required to undergo a safety inspection every year and regular passenger vehicles will not be required to undergo any type of safety inspection, only an emissions inspection every other year.

NJGCA supports changing the language to require transportation network vehicles undergo a safety inspection annually. Not only will it be fairer to actual taxis and limo services, it will also be simpler for small businesses and the Motor Vehicle Commission to have one less category of vehicles and one less type of inspection sticker to keep track of.

The requirement for more safety inspections will benefit the driver, the passenger, the motoring public, and even the small business that will have another tool in their pocket to convince at least a segment of the motoring public of the necessity of having their vehicle maintained in compliance with the state's safety laws.