

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2019 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

House Bill 1243 (Delegate Attar, *et al.*)
Environment and Transportation

Motor Scooter Sharing Companies - Nonvisual Access

This bill requires a motor scooter sharing company to (1) include a tactile phone number on each motor scooter so that a blind or visually impaired individual can contact the company and (2) provide nonvisual access to its website and mobile application that provides full and equal accessibility to individuals with disabilities, as specified, and is consistent with the standards set by the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The bill does not directly affect State operations or finances.

Local Effect: The bill does not directly affect local governmental operations or finances.

Small Business Effect: Minimal.

Analysis

Bill Summary: “Motor scooter sharing company” means a person that makes motor scooters available to the public for lease on a short-term basis. “Nonvisual access” means the ability through keyboard control, synthesized speech, or other methods not requiring sight to receive, use, and manipulate information and operate controls necessary to access information technology (IT).

Current Law: The Secretary of Information Technology has numerous duties related to the development, review, maintenance, and procurement of IT projects and services, including adopting by regulation and enforcing nonvisual access standards to be used in the procurement of IT services. The regulations governing nonvisual access standards are

similar to many (but not all) of the standards required by § 508 of the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

“Motor scooter” means a nonpedal vehicle that has a seat for the operator, has two wheels, has a step-through chassis, has a motor that meets certain specifications, and is equipped with an automatic transmission. It does not include a vehicle that has been manufactured for off-road use, including a motorcycle or all-terrain vehicle.

Background:

Motor Scooters in Baltimore City

According to media reports, recently, a number of motor scooter sharing companies (such as Bird and Lime) have established their operations in Baltimore City. The scooter rental service allows individuals to rent electric scooters on a short-term basis to travel around the city. Generally, the scooters can travel at a maximum of 15 miles per hour and can travel about 15 miles on a single charge. Instead of having more traditional dedicated charging stations, the companies have established a system to pay city residents (through a cell phone application) to take the scooters home, recharge them, and return them to streets for others to use. Since there is no identified charging location for users to leave the scooters, they can be found throughout the city, frequently on sidewalks.

The Maryland Department of Disabilities (MDOD) advises that the bill is intended to address an issue that blind and visually impaired individuals have been experiencing with motor scooters both being ridden on sidewalks and left in the middle of sidewalks in Baltimore City. Even though the scooters generally include a warning that using the scooters on sidewalks is prohibited, many users do so anyway. While dangerous for any pedestrian, this behavior poses even more danger for blind and visually impaired individuals who cannot see the scooters coming and get out of the way of an irresponsible user. Furthermore, scooters are sometimes left strewn in the middle of sidewalks, which creates tripping hazards, particularly for individuals who are blind or visually impaired.

MDOD advises that blind and visually impaired individuals have little recourse to report problems and incidents related to motor scooters; the bill, therefore, sets forth a way to contact those companies.

Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973

In 1998, the U.S. Congress amended the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 to require federal agencies to make their electronic and information technology (EIT) accessible to people with disabilities. The law ([29 U.S.C. § 794 \(d\)](#)) applies to all federal agencies when they develop, procure, maintain, or use EIT. Under § 508, agencies must give disabled

employees and members of the public access to information that is comparable to the access that is available to others.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: SB 805 (Senator Waldstreicher) - Finance.

Information Source(s): Maryland Department of Disabilities; Department of State Police; Maryland Department of Transportation; WMAR News; mileiq.com; Department of Legislative Services

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md/kdm

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