

Testimony presented on behalf of UCP/CLASS by Lucy C. Spruill, M.S.W., Public Policy Director at Transportation Committee hearings on Friday, June 18, 2010:

Chairman Markosek, members of the Transportation Committee, and everyone gathered here this morning to address the important issue of Transportation in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania: Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to testify this morning. UCP/CLASS is the third largest nonprofit organization serving people with disabilities in Western Pennsylvania. We serve approximately 3,000 people with disabilities daily in Allegheny County alone, most of them receiving daily living support in their own homes. We have approximately 600 employees who provide assistance of all kinds to our participants. Most of our participants, and in fact most people with disabilities in Pennsylvania, rely solely on public transportation for all of their transportation needs. In addition, many senior citizens in our Commonwealth who can no longer drive also rely on public transportation for at least some of their transportation needs. This is a substantial number of citizens because we have the second oldest population in the country, and people over 65 are the fastest growing sector of our population. In Allegheny County alone, at least 4500 people with disabilities and 12,000 senior citizens rely on public transportation for a substantial part of their transportation needs. In addition, over half of our employees rely on public transportation to get to the homes of the people they assist. Without public transportation, our ability to assist people with disabilities to get to work or school, or to receive long term care in their own homes, would be severely compromised.

UCP/CLASS strongly supports the creation of a predictable, dedicated, and growable funding source for public transportation in Pennsylvania, knowing full well that creation of such dedicated funding will involve raising specific taxes or fees for specific services and thus imposing a cost on the citizens of Pennsylvania. We will support legislators who vote for these increased revenues. As the saying goes, there is no free lunch. At this time we have efficient, cost effective, and well-used public transportation throughout Pennsylvania. Public transportation is also environmentally sound and achieves the goal of reducing our use of imported and American carbon fuels. This transportation can be either paratransit (which is door-to-door, shared ride, advance reservation accessible vehicle service), or accessible fixed route service. We can either commit funding to maintain this valuable resource, or we will have to commit additional funding to unemployment compensation, medical assistance, and other forms of relief for low income and disabled individuals who can no longer get to work without public transportation; to medical assistance for nursing home care for senior citizens and people with disabilities who cannot stay in their own homes because we can't get services to them; and to cleaning up the environmental consequences of thousands more automobiles on our streets and highways.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the passage of the ADA, Federal civil rights legislation which guarantees fair access to employment, public accommodations, government services, public transportation, and communication for people with disabilities. Accessible public transportation is the engine that drives this entire landmark law. Without public transportation, we citizens with disabilities have no way to get to job training and higher education, places of employment, public accommodations, and government programs and services. If public transportation is reduced below the level that meets real needs or is priced out of reach of most citizens, people with disabilities will again become invisible members of our society.