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Response to Assistance dogs and taxis – March 2017

Thank you for contacting me about assistance dog owners and taxis.

I know that taxis and private hire vehicles (PHV) are essential for many disabled people, and drivers are required to make reasonable adjustments for disabled passengers. The Equality Act 2010 places duties on taxi and private hire vehicle (PHV) drivers to carry assistance dogs at no additional charge. The Department for Transport (DfT) has issued guidance to the licensed trade on the provisions in the Equality Act that require taxis and private hire vehicles to carry guide and other assistance dogs.

Failure to comply with this requirement can result in prosecution and a fine on conviction of up to £1,000. A driver was recently fined £1,546, including legal costs, for refusing access to a guide dog. I think this sends a strong message right across the industry, and I hope my ministerial colleagues will draw it to the attention of licensing authorities.

Although there is no legal requirement for taxi and private hire vehicle drivers to undertake disability awareness training, the Department for Transport's Best Practice Guidance on taxi and private hire vehicle licensing recommends that local licensing authorities to work with the industry in their area to improve drivers' awareness of the needs of disabled people. This includes encouraging their drivers to undertake disability awareness training.

Discrimination against disabled people is unacceptable - of course, assistance dog users should be able to use taxis and PHVs without hindrance. As I have outlined, the DfT has already issued guidance on the existing law. I would note in particular the significant potential fines for refusing to carry assistance dogs. While I therefore do not feel that this Bill is necessary, I will carefully monitor developments in this area.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Kind regards,

Craig Whittaker MP