

Senate Transportation Committee

Testimony on SB 379 (Opposition)

February 2, 2022

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

My name is Philip Koopman and I study and work on safety critical systems for a living, including working on autonomous vehicle safety for more than 25 years at Carnegie Mellon University. I am also actively involved with AV policy and standards as well as more general embedded system design and software quality. I was the principal technical contributor to the ANSI/UL 4600 standard for autonomous system safety issued in 2020. This standard specifically addresses the ability of autonomous products to perform safely and as intended — without human intervention — based on their current state and sensing of the operating environment.

Thank you for allowing me to testify today as a safety advocate. I believe that with a deliberate, safety-conscious approach automated vehicles can improve roadway safety. However, I am testifying opposed to SB 379 because a more balanced approach to AV regulation is called for at the moment. Automated vehicle technology is still in the developmental stage and will be for some time.

Yet, this legislation would allow the widescale deployment of an unlimited number of large commercial trucks without a training or “safety” driver in the cab. Setting aside more specific issues with the bill, it appears the legislation is based on the premise that automated driving systems are fully developed and ready to do this job safely. This is not true.

A balanced approach that fits the moment would require the manufacturer developing these systems to register with the state, take responsibility and share data on crashes, and certify they are complying with the SAE J3018 testing safety standard as well as having an effective Safety Management System. Responsible testing includes a human safety driver to be continuously overseeing vehicle operation to avoid a catastrophic crash. Operation without a safety driver should not take place until the vehicle is shown to be safe enough to deploy via conformance to industry safety standards as currently proposed by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

As drafted, this bill goes far beyond what is called for in this moment. If Kansas is interested in allowing these companies to experiment on its highways and interstates with an automated driving system, then they should be focused on that testing phase. They should not leapfrog to allow the full, unregulated deployment of these vehicles as this bill currently allows.

Thank you again for allowing me to testify today.