

# UTCC VOICE

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE UNITED TAXIDRIVERS COMMUNITY COUNCIL

*This is a special issue of the Voice devoted to news about Uber, the giant Ride Steal company that is trying to take over the Chicago taxi business. Uber spends millions on public relations to get good press, but lately the news stories have not been so pretty. Rape, accidents, lawsuits, price gouging, even strikes. Enjoy.*

## THE SHARING ECONOMY'S 'FIRST STRIKE': UBER DRIVERS TURN OFF THE APP

BY REBECCA BURNS

SILICON VALLEY TYPES OFTEN wax lyrical about the way that the app-based “sharing economy” disrupts existing business models and create new forms of social relations. When tech magnates extol “disruption,” of course, they likely aren’t talking about the sort caused by labor actions.

But on October 22, tech-giant Uber got a taste of its own disruptive medicine when drivers in at least five cities who work on the ridesharing platform turned off their apps and stopped picking up passengers, in protest of what they say are unjust working conditions and a dwindling share in the company’s profits. Some drivers are calling this action the first strike in the “sharing economy,”

a sector known for its aversion to labor organizing. A small crowd of Uber drivers and labor activists rallied outside the company’s offices in Santa Monica, California, at noon today, carrying signs



reading “Uber: 15 Hour Days and Poverty Wages” and “Stop the War on Workers.” Drivers in San Francisco held a concurrent rally, while groups in New York, Chicago and London pledged to turn off

their phones for three hours in what organizers are calling a “global day of protest” against Uber.

Another demonstrator’s sign asked, “Uber, are we your employees or your ‘partners?’” and demanded, “Stop imposing your unfair rules!” The question gets to the heart of the “sharing economy” controversy: Ask the tech companies that create “sharing” apps, and they’ll say that people who drive for Uber, rent out spare rooms on AirBnB or do small jobs via TaskRabbit aren’t employees at all; they’re “micro-entrepreneurs” or “partners” in a new kind of market.

Critics retort that these people are hardly “sharing” their time and resources out of the goodness of their hearts; rather they’re workers who have turned

to a new niche in the service economy to try to make a living—and find themselves increasingly struggling to do so.

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## UBER TAKING CABBIES FOR A RIDE

Uber is the German word for, ‘Stick em up, cabbies’

BY RON GROSSMAN

IF YOU’RE CONFUSED BY THE BATTLE BETWEEN Uber and traditional cabbies, consider this: Machine Gun Kelly didn’t legitimize bank robbing by using cutting-edge technology to persuade bank tellers to hand over the till.

Before Kelly’s innovation, bank robbers brandished pistols. But George Kelly favored a Thompson submachine gun, which gave him a nickname and a measure of immortality in Hollywood gangster movies. Still, his 1930s string of heists in Minnesota, Iowa and Washington didn’t invalidate the biblical commandment: “Thou shalt not steal.”

Yet Uber has come out of nowhere to establish a global presence with a business model based on flouting the rules of the heavily regulated taxi industry. By way of explaining itself, Uber invokes the magic word, the veritable abracadabra of the

21st century, “app.” Its website proclaims: “Uber is evolving the way the world moves. By seamlessly connecting riders to drivers through our apps, we make cities more accessible.” Tap that app on your smart phone, and a driver and car will speedily be sent your way.

As one electronic marvel has followed another, we’ve become mesmerized by a seductive but false assumption: Because wonders once scarcely dreamed of now lie at our fingertips, it seems legit to do anything that can be programmed into a computer or built into a smartphone. That ethical fallacy underlay the wave of “file-sharing” of pop music that robbed performers of royalties and put retailers out of business. Some Internet vendors are fighting a rear-guard action against charging sales tax. Because their orders arrive on electron

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**CHICAGO CABDRIVERS! YOU can help educate the public about the problems with UberX! Take extra copies of this paper and when you see passengers getting into those private cars, hand them a copy!**

## COMMON SENSE CORNER

**A**S WE ARE CELEBRATING THE 7TH anniversary of UTCC, it's imperative to strive for excellence to beat ÜBER!! We can do it in the legislative reforms we are proposing, by the public education contained in this issue of the Voice (be sure to get extra copies to share it with your customers—and give it to people getting in the ride steal cars you see on the streets!), and by outperforming their service in the streets. This is where each and every cabdriver can participate in this campaign—be the best cabdriver you can be!

We are proud and privileged to celebrate the 7th anniversary of the creation of our beloved Union, the United Taxidivers Community Council (UTCC).

It has been seven years since a group of driver activists met at Baba Palace Restaurant in Chicago and decided--after many meetings--to create the UTCC.

Since then, members and leaders have been working hard to strengthen this movement through many campaigns so we may collectively overcome oppression and achieve economic and social justice.

Year after year, and victory after victory, we continue to lead the drivers and show them the way toward prosperity and safety through our dedication to our just cause.

Our leaders have met with the City's officials in the Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection (BACP) to demand justice for the drivers, whether it was safety issues or maltreatment from the police force or the starters at the airports or lease overcharging by the owners or the lack of due process at the hearing facility at 400 west Superior Street.

As a result of these meetings the City of Chicago adopted many of our recommendations in its Ordinances and Rules and Regulations that govern the taxicab industry. That culminated in the city's approval of "The Taxi Drivers Fairness Ordinance of 2014".

This should prove to all of us that the UTCC was right all along and the vision of its leadership is worth listening to and should be granted a seat at the table, not the others (AFSCME), who know nothing about the taxi industry and who organize government employees.

There is no doubt that the taxicab industry is facing a huge challenge from the ride steal companies. Therefore, it's imperative to prove our reliability as the only transportation for hire so we may beat Über in its own game, and we will not be able to do that unless we consider the following:

We should be the first choice because we are the best -- second to none . We should be the safest because we drive safely. We offer convenient rides because we keep our cars clean inside and out. We offer enjoyable rides because we respect our customers and treat them well and we don't talk on the phone unless it is some kind of an emergency.

While on the roads :

- Use your signals at all times, Just remember the slogan " Take my Lane, Take my Turn, Just Give me a Signal "
  - On the highway drive right and pass left; don't drive slow in the passing lane. \*Don't be combative on the roads, don't race, because the flow of traffic will prevent you from flying. And it's not worth getting a speeding ticket.
  - Some drivers race each other on Michigan Avenue looking for passengers and we all know very well that people will not hail a speeding cab. Instead they would hail a slow one knowing that he would be a careful driver.
  - When you are on the highway and a slow moving vehicle is in the passing lane in front of you, what do you do to pass him? Do you give him a signal, put on your bright lights, honk?! Flip him off, Insult him,?! All this will not help you pass that crawling car. The best solution is to let it be and go around him with care.
  - When you come to an intersection use one lane only. If there is enough space for the right lane to move and pass thru, make that possible. People will love you for that.
  - Most intersections in the suburbs have smart signals where the light will change when you approach, so when you come to the light don't pass the stop line. If you do the sensor will not trigger and change the light for you until another car comes along and stops behind you behind the white stop line.
  - If you are loading luggage please come to the curb so you keep the flow of traffic going; it's safer for you and your passenger.
  - Don't pick up anybody while you have a passenger in your cab. It's disrespectful and your current passenger might file a complaint against you.
  - When you come to the area in front of hotels to unload your passenger, please don't block other cabs because they are about to leave. Stay in the line behind other cabs; they were first and if you come and park to the right of them you would prevent them from leaving and create a traffic jam.
  - Don't use your horn as a means of communication; to call the attention of a friend across the street, or alert and call someone on the second floor of an apartment building. The horn is a tip of warning in case of an emergency or danger. Farther, you may get a ticket if you use in certain location where there are signs posted in the vicinity of a " Quiet Area ".
- The previous notes come from an experienced driver who drives every day and knows and feels the road, not from an AFSCME guy who sets in the office or comes from out of state. These kinds of drivers build our movement and give advice to our rank and file to keep our Union strong and growing.
- That's why the UTCC stands out and up for us because it reflects our ethnic and religious compo-

# UTCC

## UNITED TAXIDRIVERS COMMUNITY COUNCIL

### OUR VISION

*To organize and unify all licensed chauffeurs in the Chicago area, so we can collectively overcome oppression and achieve economic and social justice.*

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***We welcome your contributions  
feedback and letters!***

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sition as a mini United Nations on wheels. Whereas others - like AFSCME - sat on the fence for years and shrugged their shoulders at issues vital to our interests and to our survival as taxi drivers, the UTCC's leadership has grappled with these challenges and brought them to the attention of the city officials and forced a solution to some of these challenges we are facing in the taxicab industry.

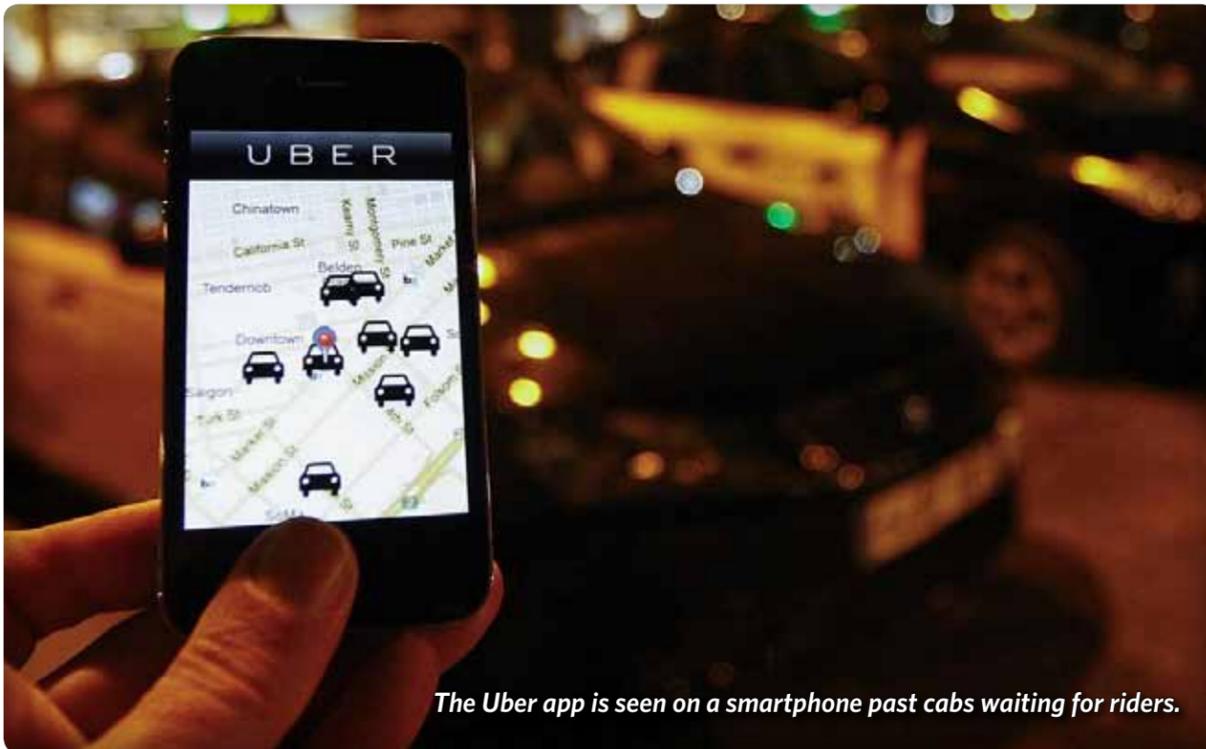
This is the spirit of our Union, this is the spirit of organized labor, and TOGETHER we will continue to win and strive for more justice for our taxi drivers all over the city of Chicago. And remember, TOGETHER, WE CAN DO IT!

**—FAYEZ KHOZINDAR, UTCC CHAIRMAN**

The UTCC has a plan to combat and fight UberX and the ride stealing going on: it has to do with legislative reform, out performing their service in the streets, and public education. They all depend on YOU CABDRIVERS to participate in our growing national taxi driver unionizing MOVEMENT. First step: come and join UTCC. We need your numbers, your ideas, and your resources to carry out our work. **IF YOU BELIEVE LIKE WE DO THAT IT IS ONLY US DRIVERS OURSELVES WHO CAN SOLVE OUR PROBLEMS ACROSS THE WHOLE US, THEN YOU CAN ONLY COME TO ONE CONCLUSION: IT IS YOUR DUTY TO JOIN UTCC AND PUT YOUR RESOURCES WITH THE ORGANIZATION THAT IS FIGHTING FOR ALL OF OUR HOPES AND DREAMS FOR WHAT THE TAXI INDUSTRY CAN BE IN THE FUTURE!**

# Uber's System for Screening Drivers Draws Scrutiny

BY MIKE ISAAC, REPRINTED FROM THE NEW YORK TIMES



The Uber app is seen on a smartphone past cabs waiting for riders.

**U**BER CHAMPIONS ITS “INDUSTRY-LEADING standards” for vetting its drivers. On its website, it describes its background checks as “often more rigorous” than those in the traditional taxi industry.

But in statehouses across the country, Uber has fought against legislation requiring background checks as strong as those demanded of traditional taxis. Other ride-sharing companies like Lyft and Sidecar, Uber’s chief rivals, have also pushed against the laws, but supporters of stronger background checks say Uber has been by far the most aggressive.

In Colorado, the company helped persuade lawmakers to ease drivers’ background checks in a bill that legalized ride-sharing companies. In Illinois, after a lobbying push, Gov. Pat Quinn vetoed a bill that would have forced Uber to strengthen those checks.

And in California, Uber and other companies like it helped kill a law that would have required drivers to undergo a background check by the state’s Justice Department, as is required of taxi drivers.

## Some Legal Actions Taken Against Uber

At the same time, the rigor of Uber’s checks has come into question. On Monday, Uber was banned in New Delhi after a driver was accused of raping a customer; New Delhi authorities said the driver, who was previously accused of raping another female passenger in 2011, was not properly vetted by Uber.

“We don’t know if their background checks are good, bad or indifferent,” said Max Tyler, a Colorado state representative who is critical of Uber’s approach to rider safety. “In Colorado, the bill did not have an F.B.I. background check, no fingerprint check, none of the things taxi drivers must go through.”

“Maybe Uber is doing a good job vetting drivers, maybe not,” he added.

Uber vigorously defended its process.

“Uber is on track to complete more than two million background checks in 2014,” said Lane Kasselmann, an Uber spokesman. “It’s a responsibility we take seriously.”

Erin Simpson, a Lyft spokeswoman, said that safety was Lyft’s “top priority” and that its checks

“far exceed what’s required for taxis and limos in nearly every municipality across the country.”

Uber, a five-year-old company that has raised about \$2.7 billion in cash and is valued by investors at over \$40 billion, is in the limelight these days. It is expanding at breakneck speed, hiring thousands of drivers in more than 250 cities worldwide, with rumors of an eventual public offering. It has vast ambitions — to become a delivery service replacing not just taxis but couriers like the United Parcel Service, and grocery and restaurant delivery services.

At the same time, though, it is facing scrutiny. Attention intensified last month, after an Uber executive said the company should dig up dirt on reporters critical of its business. Senator Al Franken, Democrat of Minnesota, has demanded that the company explain its privacy policies.

On Monday, a Dutch court barred UberPop, the company’s low-cost service, from operating in the Netherlands; that same day, the city of Portland, Ore., sued Uber, saying it was operating an “illegal, unregulated transportation service.” In Spain on Tuesday, a judge issued a temporary ban against Uber’s operations after protests from the country’s taxi associations.

Background checks have become a hot point of debate, with the New Delhi case just the most recent to raise the issue.

This year, an Uber driver who had been convicted of reckless driving in Florida was arrested in San Francisco in the death of a 6-year-old girl. The child’s family filed a wrongful-death suit. On Monday, the driver was charged with misdemeanor vehicular manslaughter.

Last year, an Uber driver was accused of assaulting a passenger in San Francisco; he was previously convicted of a felony drug charge, an offense that should have disqualified him from working for Uber under its own procedures.

The push in state capitals against background checks is a reflection of how Travis C. Kalanick, Uber’s founder and chief executive, has made it a top priority to navigate laws that he says are outdated and protected by the taxi industry, and that would slow Uber’s growth. In August, he hired David Plouffe, who helped President Obama win the presidency, because, he said, “we are in the

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 8**

## COMMUNITY ALERT: Boston Police Investigating Reports of Indecent Assaults Involving Transportation Services

**T**HE BOSTON POLICE DEPARTMENT IS asking community members to exercise caution when utilizing transportation services in Boston. At present, the Boston Police Department is investigating three separate reports of incidents involving indecent assaults:

1. At about 12:58am, on Sunday, December 14, 2014, officers spoke to a victim who stated that she had been indecently assaulted by an individual she believed to be employed by a rideshare service. According to the victim, she arranged for pick-up in the area of Dorchester Avenue and Columbia Road. Once inside the vehicle, the victim states that the operator offered her money and touched her inappropriately. While still in the car, the victim states that she received a text from her actual authorized timeshare operator stating that he had arrived to pick her up. At this point, the

victim ordered the operator to stop the car so that she could exit the vehicle and call police. A search of the area for the suspect’s vehicle was unsuccessful.

2. At about 2:34am, on Sunday, December 14, 2014, officers spoke to a victim who stated that she had been assaulted by an individual she believed to be employed by a rideshare service. According to the victim, she arranged for transportation from 1030 Commonwealth Avenue to her home. Once inside the vehicle, the victim states that the operator made attempts to touch her inappropriately. After refusing unwanted advances, the victim ordered the operator to stop the car so that she could exit the vehicle.
3. At about 2:50am, on Sunday, December 14, 2014, officers spoke to a victim who stated

that she had been indecently assaulted by an individual who she believed to be employed by a rideshare service. According to the victim, she arranged for transportation from Faneuil Hall to a location in Dorchester. During the ride, the victim says she fell asleep and woke to the driver indecently assaulting her.

The Boston Police Department continues to actively review and investigate the facts and circumstances surrounding these incidents. Anyone with information is strongly urged to contact the Boston Police Sexual Assault Unit at (617) 343-4400. ■

*This article originally appeared here: [bpdnews.com/news/2014/12/15/community-alert-boston-police-investigating-reports-of-indecent-assaults-involving-transportation-services](http://bpdnews.com/news/2014/12/15/community-alert-boston-police-investigating-reports-of-indecent-assaults-involving-transportation-services)*

# Uber Driver Charged With Kidnapping, Sexual Assault

BY CHRIS CAESAR

**A** BOSTON MAN WHO WORKS AS A DRIVER for the Uber rideshare service now faces charges after he allegedly beat, strangled and sexually assaulted a young Cambridge woman he picked up earlier this month.

Investigators said it was not clear if Alejandro Done, 46, used the information obtained in his capacity as an independent contractor employed by Uber to carry out his alleged attack. A company spokesperson confirmed Done was an Uber driver but that he was not on call when he allegedly picked up the victim. Done passed an employment background check, according to the spokesperson.

The victim told police Done picked her up outside of a Tremont Street residence in Boston around 7:30 p.m. on Dec. 6, where she was waiting for an ordered Uber car. A statement from the Middlesex District Attorney's office said the company was cooperating with their investigation.

Done reportedly told her he needed cash for the ride—outside of normal Uber protocols,

which require credit card payments—and drove her to an ATM. After the victim returned to the car, authorities said Done drove to a secluded area, where he got in the backseat with the woman and attacked her.

The victim told police Done struck her with his hands, strangled her, locked her inside the vehicle, and covered her mouth. Done sexually assaulted her during the struggle, authorities said.

“This is a despicable crime and our thoughts and prayers are with the victim during her recovery,” Uber spokesperson Kaitlin Durkosh wrote in a statement to Boston.com. “Uber has been working closely with law enforcement and will continue to do everything we can to assist their investigation.”

Done was arraigned on charges of rape, assault to rape, kidnapping and two counts of assault and battery, according to a statement from the Middlesex District Attorney's office. He was held without bail pending a dangerousness hearing later this month.

It's not clear if the attacks were related to a

string of similar sex assaults reported by ride-share customers last weekend. Those remain under investigation by Boston Police.

“While these services are a convenience, and often a necessity of modern urban living, we urge everyone to take precautions to ensure they are as safe as possible,” District Attorney Marian Ryan said in a statement. “Confirm that the car you are getting into is the particular one you have ordered. Be cautious if the driver is asking you to do something that you understand to be against company policy, as when they request you pay by cash when you understand that the company receives payment by credit card.” ■

Editor's note: An earlier version of this story referred to Done as an Uber employee. The company classifies its drivers as independent contractors.

*This article originally appeared: [www.boston.com/business/innovation/2014/12/17/uber-driver-charged-with-kidnapping-sexually-assaulting-boston-passenger/cpHMq93ucWeNQYQRMgOlgI/story.html?s\\_campaign=8315](http://www.boston.com/business/innovation/2014/12/17/uber-driver-charged-with-kidnapping-sexually-assaulting-boston-passenger/cpHMq93ucWeNQYQRMgOlgI/story.html?s_campaign=8315)*

# Police investigating allegations that Uber driver assaulted female customer

BY JEREMY GORNER

**T**HE ONLINE CAR SERVICE UBER SAYS IT has “removed” one of its drivers as police investigate allegations that he sexually assaulted a female customer in Lincoln Square last month.

The woman told police she had been out with friends from work when she called for an Uber car at 2:50 a.m. on Nov. 16, according to the police report. She got in the back seat but the driver asked that she sit in front because he was unfamiliar with the area, police said.

When they reached Lawrence and Western avenues, the driver began assaulting the woman and she blacked out, according to the report.

The woman told police she woke up later in a home with the driver on top of her, sexually assaulting her. The driver eventually took her home, where she texted a friend saying she was raped by an Uber cab driver, according to the police report.

Hours later, the woman walked into the 20th District police station and talked to officers, then

went to Swedish Covenant Hospital, according to the police report.

Chicago police said in a statement Wednesday that detectives “have been in contact with the victim and Uber personnel” and that they “continue to investigate” the alleged incident.

Uber spokeswoman Jennifer Mullin declined to discuss details but released a statement saying “we immediately removed the driver from the Uber platform when we learned of the incident and are cooperating with the Chicago Police Department in the ongoing investigation.

“This is an appalling and unacceptable incident, and first and foremost our thoughts are with the victim and her family,” she added.

Mullin said all drivers with the ridesharing service undergo a “rigorous background check.”

The attack allegedly occurred last month and no charges have been filed, according to police.

Uber is one of several ride-sharing services gaining popularity in cities, despite opposition

from taxi companies that typically operate under stricter regulations.

The Chicago investigation comes as Uber has been in the news in other states,

On Tuesday, California prosecutors said a former Uber driver was charged with misdemeanor vehicular manslaughter in the death of a 6-year-old girl who was struck in a San Francisco crosswalk on New Year's Eve.

On Monday, Portland, Ore. sued Uber to stop the service from operating in the city until it follows local regulations.

The same day, the company was banned from operating in India's capital, New Delhi, after a female passenger accused one of its drivers of rape.

The fast-growing company was valued at \$40 billion last week after its latest funding round ahead of an expected initial public offering. ■

*This article originally appeared: [chicagotribune.com/news/local/breaking/chi-chicago-investigating-uber-driver-20141209-story.html](http://chicagotribune.com/news/local/breaking/chi-chicago-investigating-uber-driver-20141209-story.html)*



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# Is Uber's Business Model Screwing Its Workers?

BY AVI ASHER-SCHAPIRO



*There's nothing innovative or new about this business model. Uber is just capitalism, in its most naked form. (Flickr / Joakim Formo)*

**K**AZI DRIVES A TOYOTA PRIUS FOR UBER IN Los Angeles. He hates it.

He barely makes minimum wage, and his back hurts after long shifts. But every time a passenger asks what it's like working for Uber, he lies: "It's like owning my own business; I love it."

Kazi lies because his job depends on it. After passengers finish a ride, Uber asks them to rate their driver on a scale from one to five stars. Drivers with an average below 4.7 can be deactivated — tech-speak for fired.

Gabriele Lopez, an LA Uber driver, also lies.

"We just sit there and smile, and tell everyone that the job's awesome, because that's what they want to hear," said Lopez, who's been driving for UberX, the company's low-end car service, since it launched last summer.

In fact, if you ask Uber drivers off the clock what they think of the company, it often gets ugly fast. "Uber's like an exploiting pimp," said Arman, an Uber driver in LA who asked me to withhold his last name out of fear of retribution. "Uber takes 20 percent of my earnings, and they treat me like shit — they cut prices whenever they want. They can deactivate me whenever they feel

like it, and if I complain, they tell me to fuck off."

In LA, San Francisco, Seattle, and New York, tension between drivers and management has bubbled over in recent months. And even though Uber's business model discourages collective action (each worker is technically in competition with each other), some drivers are banding together.

Uber drivers in LA, the largest ride-sharing market in the country, held dozens of protests over the summer to oppose rate cuts. Late last month, drivers working with Teamsters Local 986 launched the California App-based Drivers Association (CADA), a sort of Uber drivers union. Uber workers in Seattle have staged their own protests and have formed the Seattle Ride-Share Drivers Association. Just last week in New York City, drivers for the luxury UberBlack service threatened to strike and successfully reversed a company decision that would have forced them to pick up cheaper and less lucrative UberX rides. On Monday, drivers protested again.

"We want the company to understand that we are not just ants," Joseph DeWolf, a member of CADA's leadership council, told me at the Teamsters Union hall in El Monte, California. "What we want is a living wage, an open channel of communication with the company, and basic respect." DeWolf said CADA is signing up members, collecting dues, and plans to strike in LA if Uber refuses to come to the negotiating table.

It won't be easy. Drivers are going up against a burgeoning goliath valued at around \$18 billion. The company just hired David Plouffe, who managed Barack Obama's presidential campaigns; it's active in 130 cities; and if company executives are to be believed, it doubles its revenue every six months.

Uber makes that money by relying on a network of thousands of drivers who are not tech-

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# Uber Executive Suggests Digging Up Dirt On Journalists

BY CHRIS CAESAR

**A** SENIOR EXECUTIVE AT UBER suggested that the company should consider hiring a team of opposition researchers to dig up dirt on its critics in the media — and specifically to spread details of the personal life of a female journalist who has criticized the company.

The executive, Emil Michael, made the comments in a conversation he later said he believed was off the record. In a statement through Uber Monday evening, he said he regretted them and that they didn't reflect his or the company's views.

His remarks came as Uber seeks to improve its relationship with the media and the image of its management team, who have been cast as insensitive and hyper-aggressive even as the company's business and cultural reach have boomed.

Michael, who has been at Uber for more than a year as its senior vice president of business, floated the idea at a dinner Friday at Manhattan's Waverly Inn attended by an influential New York crowd including actor Ed Norton and publisher Arianna Huffington. The dinner was hosted by Ian Osborne, a former adviser to British Prime Minister David Cameron and consultant to the company.

At the dinner, Uber CEO and founder Tra-



*Emil Michael, senior vice president of business for Uber, in July. (David Paul Morris/Bloomberg via Getty Images)*

vis Kalanick, boyish with tousled graying hair and a sweater, made the case that he has been miscast as an ideologue and as insensitive to driver and rider complaints, while in fact he has largely had his head down building a transformative company that has beat his own

and others' wildest expectations.

A BuzzFeed editor was invited to the dinner by the journalist Michael Wolff, who later said that he had failed to communicate that the gathering would be off the record; neither Kalanick, his communications director, nor any other Uber official suggested to BuzzFeed News that the event was off the record.

Michael, who Kalanick described as "one of the top deal guys in the Valley" when he joined the company, is a charismatic and well-regarded figure who came to Uber from Klout. He also sits on a board that advises the Department of Defense.

Over dinner, he outlined the notion of spending "a million dollars" to hire four top opposition researchers and four journalists. That team could, he said, help Uber fight back against the press — they'd look into "your personal lives, your families," and give the media a taste of its own medicine.

Michael was particularly focused on one journalist, Sarah Lacy, the editor of the Silicon Valley website PandoDaily, a sometimes combative voice inside the industry. Lacy recently accused Uber of "sexism and misogyny." She wrote that she was deleting her Uber app after BuzzFeed News reported that Uber appeared to

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 8**

# Uber Driver Charged With Sexual Assault of Passenger

BY MARK SCHIPPER AND TANVEER ALI

**A**N UBER DRIVER WAS CHARGED WITH criminal sexual assault Monday, more than a month after allegedly raping a passenger in Lincoln Square.

Maxime Fohounhedo, 30, of the 4400 block of North Lawndale Avenue, was charged with criminal sexual assault and criminal sexual abuse, according to police.

The incident occurred on Nov. 16 after the victim requested a ride from Uber about 2:30 a.m. after a night out with her colleagues in River North, according to a police report filed later that day.

The passenger was getting into the back seat of the Uber driver's black four-door car about 20 minutes later, when the driver told her to get in the front seat because he wasn't familiar with the area where she was going, the report said.

With the woman in the front seat, the driver later parked the car near Lawrence and Western avenues and grabbed the woman, the report said.

The woman blacked out and recalled being in an apartment with the driver on top of her, police said. He later drove her home in the same car, according to the report.

The woman texted a friend shortly after 4 a.m. about the incident before falling asleep, the report said.

"I was just sexually assaulted by my Uber driver and I'm supberb (sic) drunk, but I need someone to remind me to follow through to make sure this never happens again," she texted, according to the report.

The 22-year-old victim was treated at Swedish Covenant Hospital, police said.

Before Fohounhedo's arrest, Uber spokeswoman Jennifer Mullin said in a statement that the company "immediately removed the driver from



the Uber platform" after the company was notified of the incident.

"This is an appalling and unacceptable incident, and first and foremost our thoughts are with the victim and her family," stated Mullin, the Uber spokeswoman. "We immediately removed the driver from the Uber platform when we learned of the reported incident and are cooperating fully with law enforcement. We stand ready to assist them however we can to hold

the perpetrator accountable."

Fohounhedo is due in bond court Tuesday. ■

*This article originally appeared on DNAINfo Chicago: [dnainfo.com/chicago/20141229/lincoln-square/uber-driver-charged-with-sexual-assault-after-allegedly-raping-passenger](http://dnainfo.com/chicago/20141229/lincoln-square/uber-driver-charged-with-sexual-assault-after-allegedly-raping-passenger)*

## Uber Drivers Turn Off App

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Uber has been a target of particular resentment because of recent fare cuts. In September, the company emailed drivers to say that a summer discount on its standard "UberX" service of between 15 and 20 percent, depending on the city, would be continued into the autumn. In an infographic accompanying an email to drivers in July, the company reasoned that the price cut would generate higher demand for rides, leading to more trips per shift and resulting, ultimately, in a boost to drivers' bottom line.

Many drivers, however, were unconvinced. "I had an awesome day! I earned \$5.33 an hour!" snarked one UberX driver on an online driver forum. Thanks to highway tolls and long trips to pick up passengers wanting to go only a few blocks, he explained, more rides hadn't offset the lower fares.

On top of the lower prices, Uber has also demanded a larger cut of fares. New UberX drivers in San Francisco now hand over 25 percent of their earnings to the company; drivers for the more expensive Uber black-car and SUV services, which unlike UberX are operated only by professional drivers, surrender 25 and 28 percent, respectively.

After months of scattered unrest among Uber drivers, the California App-based Drivers Association (CADA), a labor group affiliated with the Teamsters, called for protests outside Uber offices in cities nationwide at noon on October 22. CADA was formed earlier this year in Los Angeles and has staged several protests there, but believed a coordinated outpouring of dissatisfaction would have greater effect.

"It shows Uber that drivers are speaking with each other, and it shows consumers and the shareholders that it's not just one group of disgruntled or unprofessional drivers—there's a problem nationwide," says Joseph DeWolf Sandoval, co-founder and president of CADA.

Indeed, groups of Uber drivers in other cities quickly picked up the call. After learning about CADA, London Uber drivers opted to form their own association, the London Private Hire App-based Drivers Associations (LPHADA).

"London is one of the most expensive cities in the world," says LPHADA member Yaseen Aslam, who has been driving for the company since UberX launched in London in July 2013. "It used to be that [drivers] could make a living working eight hours a day. Now, many are working 12 or more to make the same amount of money. That

puts a strain on their health and family lives, as well as the safety of passengers."

The association is calling on Uber to reduce its commission from 20 percent to 10 percent of drivers' fares, add a tip option to the platform and consult with LPHADA before any further changes to fares or commissions, along with several other demands.

There are many challenges to organizing Uber drivers. In addition to their isolation and unpredictable schedules, both Aslam and DeWolf Sandoval believe a fear of retaliation keeps many drivers from complaining. Organizers in London and New York told *In These Times* that they had initially planned to stage protests, but fearing low turnout, they instead opted to focus on reaching out to drivers to strike by shutting off their phones.

"Uber can deactivate—basically, fire—a driver without cause or explanation. It's a stick in the classic stick and carrot scenario, except there's no carrot. The drivers live in fear," says DeWolf Sandoval.

Uber acknowledges that if drivers' ratings from passengers dip too low, they may not be allowed to continue on the platform. DeWolf Sandoval says that drivers have also been told that their ratings could drop if they decline too many ride requests or refuse lower-fare UberX rides when driving on the Uber Plus platform. He adds that several officers in CADA have experienced precipitous drops in their ratings or had their cars downgraded to the lower-fare UberX service, in what they suspect may be an attempt to chill driver organizing.

DeSandoval Wolf says that Uber has thus far refused to meet with CADA, and hopes that the protests will force the company to "recognize that drivers are attempting to organize, and that our organization wants to sit down and have a real conversation with Uber management."

One Uber driver was even briefly fired for Tweeting a comment critical of the company. The driver received an email from an Uber operations manager informing him that his account had been permanently suspended "due to hateful statements regarding Uber," though the company later reversed course after the story went viral.

A statement provided to *In These Times* by Uber said, "Four years ago, drivers simply didn't have the economic opportunity they have today. Uber powers entrepreneurship and provides the tools for drivers to build their own small business - that is a fundamental and significant change from the status quo, where drivers start the day at least \$100 in the hole just to rent their taxi."

At the moment, since Uber drivers are clas-

sified as independent contractors rather than employees, they are legally prohibited from taking the next step and forming a union. Many are waiting with bated breath for the outcome of a class action lawsuit, filed by San Francisco Uber drivers in August 2013, charging that they have been misclassified and are owed tips and expenses that would legally be due to employees.

In the meantime, drivers can do plenty to change the status quo, says New York Taxi Workers Alliance Executive Director Bhairavi Desai, whose umbrella organization the National Taxi Workers Alliance made history in 2011 when it became the first independent contractor workforce to affiliate with the AFL-CIO.

"There's no question that the taxi industry is one of the most exploitive industries, and what Uber has done is magnify that exploitation," says Desai.

By operating in a regulatory gray zone, Uber is able to offer cheaper fares in part by skirting the consumer and labor protections that bind traditional taxi companies. Cab drivers who believe Uber is undercutting their business have held several large protests against the company, including a multi-city European strike in June.

But Desai says that in New York, the two groups are now working together. Many traditional taxi drivers switched to Uber when its fares were higher and they believed they would be able to make more money. Now, once again facing low wages, many drivers are exporting the organizing model built up over years in the taxi industry.

"Taxi drivers, like Uber drivers, have been very invisible," explains Desai, noting their isolation from each other and longtime exclusion from the mainstream labor movement. "We've really broken through that by having mass actions on the street and work stoppages, and that's the same model that the Uber driver movement is utilizing."

Drivers have debated back and forth whether to term their protest a work stoppage or "strike." DeWolf Sandoval emphasizes that drivers will only be stopping work for a few hours, but hopes to send a clear message to the company.

"If we're not driving, I don't think Uber managers are inclined to hop in their cars, put X's on the front and shuttle people around L.A.," he says.

Aslam believes the action amounts to a strike by Uber drivers.

"At the end of the day, it is the drivers who make Uber successful," he says. "Without them, Uber's technology is useless." ■

*This article originally appeared on Working In These Times: <http://goo.gl/BqxLqk>*

# New Delhi bans Uber over rape accusations

BY RAMA LAKSHMI AND ANNIE GOWEN



Protesters shout slogans Dec. 8 in New Delhi as they participate in a candlelight vigil against the alleged rape of a female Uber passenger. (Anindito Mukherjee/Reuters)

**T**RANSPORTATION OFFICIALS IN INDIA’S capital banned the online car service Uber on Monday after one of its drivers was arrested on suspicion of raping a passenger.

The move was a blow for Uber in the huge Indian market, as well as another public-relations headache.

The San Francisco-based company, which operates in 45 countries, has come under fire for what some consider a lax attitude toward protecting the private data of its customers and ensuring passenger safety.

In New Delhi, protesters on Monday demanded greater protections for women as police called in an Uber official for questioning about the company’s screening methods, saying it had not taken

simple security measures, such as fingerprinting the accused cabdriver or conducting a background check.

Shiv Kumar Yadav, 32, was arrested Saturday on suspicion of sexually assaulting a passenger who was on her way home from a party the previous night. Police said he was acquitted of rape charges in a 2011 incident.

In a statement, the Delhi Transport Department condemned the “unfortunate and heinous crime,” banning Uber from operating in the city. The service continues in several other major cities in India.

The alleged rape came as a chilling reminder of Delhi’s continued inability to provide safe commuting options for women at night — even after the fatal gang rape of a woman aboard a moving

bus two years ago.

Uber said in a statement Sunday that safety was its top “priority.”

“What happened over the weekend in New Delhi is horrific,” the statement said. “Our entire team’s hearts go out to the victim of this despicable crime.”

Uber’s chief executive, Travis Kalanick, stopped short of acknowledging systemic company failings. A statement by Kalanick deflected some of the blame onto India’s licensing norms, saying Uber will “work with the government to establish clear background checks currently absent in their commercial transportation licensing programs.”

Police said their investigation has revealed shortcomings in the company’s Indian operations, which apparently were so bare-bones that investigators were unable to locate the phone number or address of Uber’s India office on the company’s Web site when the rape complaint was made.

A report in the newspaper Indian Express said police had to finally download the Uber application and book a cab to locate the Gurgaon address of the company.

Uber has been under scrutiny almost since its 2009 inception. Traditional cab companies deem it an illegal taxi service. Despite such opposition, Uber has managed to expand aggressively throughout the United States, as well as globally since opening in Paris in 2011. But there have been growing pains overseas, in addition to criticism at home: On Monday, a Dutch court banned Uber from taking bookings on its smartphone app, threatening stiff fines for violations.

Now critics are asking whether the company grew too quickly and jeopardized passenger safety in favor of expansion.

Last month, meanwhile, an Uber executive suggested he would pay to dig up information on the personal lives of journalists writing negative things about Uber, a comment that appeared to target a Silicon Valley writer who had been

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 9**

## Taking Cabbies For a Ride

Continued from Page 1

wings, vendors think they shouldn’t have to collect the tax paid by customers in a bricks-and-mortar store.

For its part, Uber justifies playing fast and loose by claiming consumers will benefit from its competition with traditional cab companies, and some heavy bets have been wagered on its winning the race.

Uber recently announced that, having raised an additional \$1.2 billion in funding, its total valuation had reached \$18.2 billion, and shows no signs of having topped out. Huge as those numbers are, they are not the only remarkable thing about Uber’s appeal to investors.

If you or I seek a loan to buy a car or a home, the lender wants to make sure it will get its money back — even if our plans don’t work out. That’s why it retains a legal hold on the title to the vehicle or house until the loan is repaid. If we go belly up, the lender can recoup its investment by selling the collateral. The same scenario holds if we go to a pawnshop for a few bucks to tide us over until payday. We have to leave something with the pawnshop. Those guitars and jewelry in the shop window were pledged as collateral for loans that didn’t get repaid.

Now if, say, Yellow Cab or Flash Cab asked in-

vestors for the kind of money Uber has gotten, it’s easy to imagine what the collateral might have been. Cab companies have fleets of vehicles and garages. But when customers use Uber’s app, they are dispatched a car whose driver owns and maintains it. So what physical assets does Uber have, besides smartphones and computers? Try hocking a cellphone or laptop. Pointing to shelves loaded with them, a shop owner will likely ask if you have anything else of value to pawn.

A week ago, an estimated 30,000 European taxi drivers, protesting Uber’s free pass from government regulations, snarled traffic from London to Berlin. In Chicago, taxi companies filed a federal lawsuit demanding that the city enforce its taxi regulations, instead of giving app-dispatched drivers a pass. In San Francisco this week, dozens of Uber drivers rallied at the company’s headquarters, angered by Uber chief Travis Kalanick’s statement that driverless cars are the wave of the future. Even now, the drivers said, they don’t get a fair share of the fares.

So what makes Uber’s funders think that it holds the winning cards?

Their confidence may be sustained, in part, by what Chicago’s City Council recently did, making them hopeful that other cities will follow. Instead of holding Uber to the rules, it changed the rules to meet Uber’s needs. By creating a new category of “transportation network provider,” it overrode an ordinance providing that if you want to oper-

ate a vehicle as a cab, it has to be licensed as a cab. The council’s action also made explicit a handicap that cabbies were already carrying. Taxi fares are established by the city, while Uber and other “network providers” set their own fees, and can even instantaneously adjust them up or down, according to market fluctuations.

Cabs have to display a medallion, a transferable city license that can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars, plus a renewal fee. “Transportation providers” need only put a sign on their car identifying their network, and off they go. If, as its financial backers believe, Uber pulls ahead in its much touted competition for riders, the value of those taxi medallions will inexorably decline toward zilch.

When some Third World dictator threatens to nationalize a foreign-owned business, American entrepreneurs decry “expropriation,” and demand compensation. Shouldn’t they be similarly offended by Chicago ordaining a race in which one competitor plays with other people’s money, and the other stands to lose a substantial investment if it loses a competition that didn’t exist when it bought those medallions?

Is that equitable? To me, it seems more like what the Almighty had in mind when he laid down the law against stealing. ■

*This article originally appeared in the Chicago Tribune: <http://goo.gl/F4qDDg>*

## Uber's System for Screening Drivers Draws Scrutiny

Continued from Page 3

middle of a political campaign and it turns out the candidate is Uber.”

But lawmakers say that in the rush to add drivers, Uber and Lyft are choosing speed over quality in background checks.

Uber uses Hirease, a private company that says it has an average turnaround time of “less than 36 hours.” Sterling, Lyft’s private background check service, says its turnaround time averages two business days.

Both services do drug and alcohol testing, but neither does fingerprint testing. And they rely primarily on publicly available information.

Although state background checks for taxi drivers vary by jurisdiction, lawmakers say they are generally more rigorous than either of these services. They usually include searches of private databases like F.B.I. records, gaining consent from prospective drivers for those searches, said Adrin Nazarian, a California assemblyman who has pushed for stronger vetting laws.

In February, Mr. Nazarian sponsored a bill to require companies like Uber to put their drivers through the same process facing traditional taxi drivers. In California, those drivers must undergo checks by the state’s Justice Department, including fingerprint scanning, drug and alcohol testing, and searches of private databases. A check can take as little as three days, but as long as eight weeks.

“No private background check can compete with state-run background checks,” Mr. Nazarian said. “I don’t see how anyone can fight with a straight face about not wanting to have the best background check.”

Mr. Kasselmann, the Uber spokesman, said the private services procured better data because in reviewing the local, state and federal backgrounds of drivers, they go to “the source of the records rather than relying on databases that may not always be up-to-date.”

He added that a continuing external audit of Uber’s procedures had found that the company’s methodology was an improvement over traditional taxi background checks. The audit is being performed by Giuliani Partners, the consulting firm founded by Rudolph W. Giuliani, the former

mayor of New York.

The taxi and limousine industry backed the bill, and various transportation interests spent more than \$1.3 million to support it, assembly records show. Transportation industry interests have also contributed to the campaigns of more than 20 members of the California Assembly, including Mr. Nazarian.

Uber and Lyft hired lobbyists and organized a public relations campaign. Uber, which has spent over \$650,000 lobbying on California transportation issues, characterized the bill as little more than “a flagrant attempt to stymie innovation and competition by an antiquated industry.” In the summer, nearly 100 drivers and passengers protested the bill on the Assembly steps.

The bill died.

In Colorado, Uber spent about \$60,000 on lobbyists to support legislation that in June made the state one of the first to legalize companies like Uber and Lyft. That law does not require such drivers to undergo the same strict fingerprint checks required of taxi and limousine drivers.

In May, Illinois legislators passed two bills, supported by the taxi industry, that more heavily regulated ride-sharing services, including requiring state-conducted background checks for drivers.

After the bills were passed, Uber hired lobbyists, including Jack Lavin, the former chief of staff of Governor Quinn. In August, the governor vetoed the bills, saying the industry “is best regulated at the local level.”

His office did not respond to a request for further comment; Mr. Lavin did not respond either.

A new version of the legislation that would loosen background check restrictions on Uber drivers, as the Colorado law does, recently passed the Illinois House and Senate.

On Tuesday, the district attorney of San Francisco, George Gascón, announced that he had filed a civil suit against Uber, saying the company had misled consumers about its background checks. Lyft settled similar claims with the district attorney.

“You are not using an ‘industry-leading’ background check process if you are not fingerprinting your drivers,” Mr. Gascón said at a news conference. ■

*This article originally appeared here: [www.nytimes.com/2014/12/10/technology/ubers-system-for-screening-drivers-comes-under-scrutiny.html?emc=eta1&r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/10/technology/ubers-system-for-screening-drivers-comes-under-scrutiny.html?emc=eta1&r=0)*

## Uber Exec Suggests Digging Up Dirt On Journalists

Continued from Page 5

be working with a French escort service. “I don’t know how many more signals we need that the company simply doesn’t respect us or prioritize our safety,” she wrote.

At the dinner, Michael expressed outrage at Lacy’s column and said that women are far more likely to get assaulted by taxi drivers than Uber drivers. He said that he thought Lacy should be held “personally responsible” for any woman who followed her lead in deleting Uber and was then sexually assaulted.

Then he returned to the opposition research plan. Uber’s dirt-diggers, Michael said, could expose Lacy. They could, in particular, prove a particular and very specific claim about her personal life.

Michael at no point suggested that Uber has actually hired opposition researchers, or that it plans to. He cast it as something that would make sense, that the company would be justified in doing.

In a statement through an Uber spokeswoman, Michael said: “The remarks attributed to me at a private dinner — borne out of frustration during an informal debate over what I feel is sensationalistic media coverage of the company I am proud to work for — do not reflect my actual views and have no relation to the company’s views or approach. They were wrong no matter the circumstance and I regret them.”

The spokeswoman, Nairi Hourdajian, said the company does not do “oppo research” of any sort on journalists, and has never considered doing it. She also said Uber does not consider Lacy’s personal life fair game, or believe that she is responsible for women being sexually assaulted. (Lacy initially declined to comment on Michael’s remarks; she denounced them in a column after this story was published.)

Hourdajian also said that Uber has clear policies against executives looking at journalists’ travel logs, a rich source of personal information in Uber’s possession.

“Any such activity would be clear violations of our privacy and data access policies,” Hourdajian said in an email. “Access to and use of data is permitted only for legitimate business purposes. These policies apply to all employees. We regularly monitor and audit that access.”

In fact, the general manager of Uber NYC accessed the profile of a BuzzFeed News reporter, Johana Bhuiyan, to make points in the course of a discussion of Uber policies. At no point in the email exchanges did she give him permission to do so.

At the Waverly Inn dinner, it was suggested that a plan like the one Michael floated could become a problem for Uber.

Michael responded: “Nobody would know it was us.” ■

*This article originally appeared on BuzzFeed: [www.buzzfeed.com/bensmith/uber-executive-suggests-digging-up-dirt-on-journalists#.nqAKyeNMb](http://www.buzzfeed.com/bensmith/uber-executive-suggests-digging-up-dirt-on-journalists#.nqAKyeNMb)*



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## Is Uber's Business Model Screwing Its Workers?

Continued from Page 5

nically employees of the company, but rather independent contractors — the company calls them “driver-partners” — who receive a percentage of its fares.

From the very beginning, Uber attracted drivers with a bait-and-switch. Take the company's launch in LA: In May 2013, Uber charged customers a fare of \$2.75 per mile (with an additional 60¢ per minute under eleven mph). Drivers got to keep 80 percent of the fare. Working full time, drivers could make a living wage: between 15 and \$20 an hour.

Drivers rushed to sign up, and thousands leased and bought cars just to work for Uber — especially immigrants and low-income people desperate for a well-paying job in a terrible economy. But over the last year, the company has faced stiff competition from its arch-rival, Lyft. To raise demand and push Lyft out of the LA market, Uber has cut UberX fares nearly in half: to \$1.10 per mile, plus 21¢ a minute.

Uber drivers have no say in the pricing, yet they must carry their own insurance and foot the bill for gas and repairs — a cost of 56¢ per mile, according to IRS estimates. With Uber's new pricing model, drivers are forced to work under razor-thin margins. Arman, for instance, made about \$20 an hour just a year ago. And now? Some days he doesn't even break minimum wage.

His experience is quite common among LA Uber drivers I spoke to. For many, driving for Uber has become a nightmare. Arman often works up to seventeen hours a day to bring home what he used to make in an eight-hour shift. When he emailed Uber to complain about his plummeting pay, he said the company blew him off. Uber's attitude is that drivers are free to stop working if they are dissatisfied, but for drivers like Arman who've invested serious money in their cars, quitting isn't an option.

“These drivers are very vulnerable if they do not band together.” Dan McKibbin, the Teamsters' West Coast organizer, told me. “Right now they have no one to protect them.”

The company wouldn't speak to me about CADA, the Teamsters, or how it deals with driver grievances. But it seems to brush off everyone else too. Earlier this summer, when CADA leader DeWolf met with William Barnes, Uber's LA director, Barnes allegedly laughed in his face.

As DeWolf recounted, when he told Barnes that drivers planned to organize with the Teamsters, Barnes responded, “Uber would never negotiate with any group that claims to represent drivers.”

Uber repeatedly ignored my request for comment on this exchange. Instead, the company issued a statement accusing the Teamsters of trying to “line their coffers” with new Uber-driving members.

Uber claims there's no need for a union; it instead asks drivers to trust that the company acts in their best interest. Uber refused to show me complete data detailing average hourly compensation for drivers. It does claim, however, that UberX drivers are making more money now than before this summer's price cuts.

“The average fares per hour for a Los Angeles UberX driver-partner in the last four weeks were 21.4% higher than the December 2013 weekly average,” Uber spokesperson Eva Behrend told me. “And drivers on average have seen fares per hour increase 28% from where they were in May of this year.”

I couldn't find a single driver who is making more money with the lower rates.

What's clear is that for Uber drivers to get by, they're going to have to take on more rides per shift. Uber implicitly concedes as much: “With price cuts, trips per hour for partner-drivers have increased with higher demand,” Behrend said.

So while drivers make less per fare, Uber suggests they recoup losses by just driving more miles. That may make sense for an Uber analyst crunching the numbers in Silicon Valley, but for drivers, more miles means hustling to cram as many runs into a shift as possible to make the small margins worthwhile.

“These days, I won't even stop to take a shit, I just drive — sometimes for up to fifteen hours a day,” a driver named Dan told me after pulling an all-nighter bringing drunk people home from bars. “It's humiliating.”

Lower rates also means they pay more out of their own pockets for gas, and their cars depreciate

in value faster because they're driving extra miles.

Meanwhile, Uber acts as if it's doing drivers a favor by offering them work in the first place. Uber CEO Travis Kalanick, who loves giving inspirational talks about innovation, often claims that Uber helps people “become small business owners.” But working long shifts and forking over 20 percent of fares to a group of Silicon Valley app-engineers doesn't really count as owning a small business.

“They think we are a bunch of losers who can't find better jobs,” DeWolf said. “That's why they treat us like robots — like we are replaceable.”

Uber, of course, disputes this characterization. “Uber succeeds when our partner-drivers succeed,” Behrend said.

But that is just empty spin: drivers aren't partners — they are laborers exploited by their company. They have no say in business decisions and can be fired at any time. Instead of paying its employees a wage, Uber just pockets a portion of their earnings. Drivers take all the risks and front all the costs — the car, the gas, the insurance — yet it is executives and investors who get rich.

Uber is part of a new wave of corporations that make up what's called the “sharing economy.” The premise is seductive in its simplicity: people have skills, and customers want services. Silicon Valley plays matchmaker, churning out apps that pair workers with work. Now, anyone can rent out an apartment with AirBnB, become a cabbie through Uber, or clean houses using Homejoy.

But under the guise of innovation and progress, companies are stripping away worker protections, pushing down wages, and flouting government regulations. At its core, the sharing economy is a scheme to shift risk from companies to workers, discourage labor organizing, and ensure that capitalists can reap huge profits with low fixed costs.

There's nothing innovative or new about this business model. Uber is just capitalism, in its most naked form.

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**This article originally appeared: [inthesetimes.com/working/entry/17201/uber\\_s\\_business\\_model\\_screwing\\_its\\_workers](http://inthesetimes.com/working/entry/17201/uber_s_business_model_screwing_its_workers)**

## New Delhi bans Uber

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chronicling the sexual misconduct of Uber drivers in the United States.

The Indian woman who was allegedly assaulted, an unidentified 27-year-old working at a tax consulting firm in a New Delhi suburb, booked the Uber cab through her cellphone app late Friday to return home, police said. The driver took the woman to a deserted area and raped her, authorities said. She also has accused him of punching and slapping her.

When he finally dropped her at home, authorities said, he threatened to come back and kill her if she went to the police. But the woman managed to take a picture of the car with her cellphone after getting out of the vehicle.

Reports of the alleged attack shocked many Indians who have come to rely on cabs booked through companies that use GPS trackers or through smartphone applications. The option is widely regarded as safer than public transportation because the passenger's cab location can be tracked in real time.

“Sleek App, sleeker cars till one ride opens a cab of worms,” read a headline in the Indian Express on Monday.

Kunal Lalani, president of the Association of Radio Taxis in India, said the incident is likely to affect the country's burgeoning business of private cabs. Uber has been operating in India since last year.

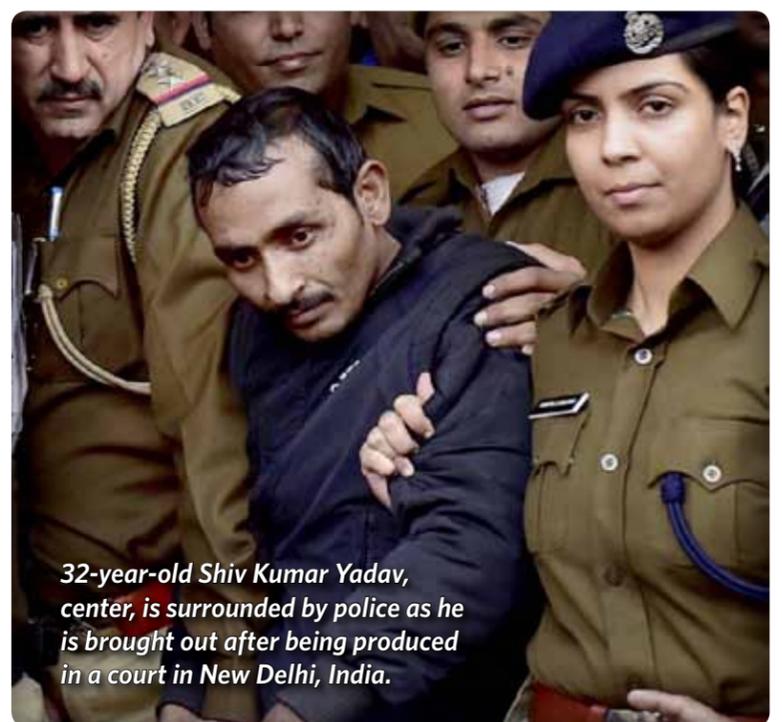
“Certainly there will be an immediate impact on the business and create trust deficit,” Lalani said.

Protesters angry about yet another high-profile case of violence against women demonstrated outside a police station in New Delhi on Monday.

“We need to invest in safe public transport and services for women. In its absence, we are relying on several private cab companies without knowing who is monitoring or regulating them,” said Suneeta Dhar, head of Jagori, a nonprofit organization that works with women.

For many women in the city, the incident is a wake-up call even though they already take precautions when using a private cab.

“I take the vehicle number and driver's number beforehand and pass it on to my family,” said Sonam Vardhan, 26, who works with an e-commerce company and commutes by private



**32-year-old Shiv Kumar Yadav, center, is surrounded by police as he is brought out after being produced in a court in New Delhi, India.**

cabs every day. ■

**This article originally appeared on the Washington Post: [washingtonpost.com/world/new-delhi-bans-american-online-cab-company-uber-after-rape-by-its-driver/2014/12/08/c775f589-05d0-48cc-a996-c60206e6d3fb\\_story.html](http://washingtonpost.com/world/new-delhi-bans-american-online-cab-company-uber-after-rape-by-its-driver/2014/12/08/c775f589-05d0-48cc-a996-c60206e6d3fb_story.html)**

## Outrage after Uber hikes prices during Sydney siege

BY ASSOCIATED PRESS

**S**YDNEY — THE CAB-HAILING COMPANY Uber was promising free rides and refunds Monday for people fleeing central Sydney after the firm came under fire for hiking prices during a hostage crisis that was unfolding there.

Technology news website Mashable reported that Uber was briefly charging customers a minimum fare of 100 Australian dollars (\$82) and four times the usual per-mile rate to leave the city center. Uber said on its smartphone app that the rates had been increased because “Demand is off the charts!,” according to Mashable.

But Uber, which offers a service based on hailing taxis from its app, quickly backtracked after an outcry on social media.

The company explained that it had used automatic “surge pricing” to encourage more drivers to get online and pick up passengers.

It wrote Monday on its Sydney blog that it was in the process of refunding people who had already paid the excessive fares and was giving free rides to others wanting to leave.

“We are all concerned with the events happening in Sydney,” Uber wrote on the blog, adding that its thoughts were with those affected by the crisis and the New South Wales police force.

Many users had earlier expressed outrage: “You are horrible. Taking advantage of a situation to make a buck. If u were the only way home, I’D



WALK!” wrote one person on Twitter under the hashtag #ubersydney.

The crisis began Monday morning when a gunman took an unknown number of hostages at the Lindt Chocolat Cafe in downtown Sydney. The usually busy area became deserted as

Christmas shoppers fled, offices were evacuated and streets closed. ■

*This article originally appeared: [nypost.com/2014/12/15/uber-offers-free-rides-after-price-hike-during-sydney-siege/](http://nypost.com/2014/12/15/uber-offers-free-rides-after-price-hike-during-sydney-siege/)*

## Korean Authorities Charge Uber Over Transportation Laws, Threaten CEO With Jail Time

BY JON RUSSELL



Uber CEO Travis Kalanick

**U**BER CEO TRAVIS KALANICK IS FACING A possible fine or jail sentence in Korea after prosecutors charged the company and its founder with violating local transportation laws, according to Yonhap News.

The controversial U.S. taxi booking service is currently under pressure from authorities in Taiwan and Thailand right now, but barely a day seems to pass without some regulator or government somewhere taking exception to its business model. These charges in Korea, however, are more substantial than the ban that Uber tends to attract.

Kalanick and the head of local car rental service MK Korea are charged with violating transportation laws which forbid rental car businesses from offering passenger transportation services using their vehicles.

Yonhap News reports that Korea’s courts could dole out substantial fines or, potentially, a prison sentence of up to two years.

Uber launched in Korea in October, but authorities declared its service to be illegal even before it arrived. Things have continued on that path ever since, and the government is now even offering rewards to citizens who report drivers

operating via unlicensed taxi services, a move that is almost certainly aimed squarely at Uber.

The U.S. company hit back at the whistle blower campaign by claiming it is in breach of the Korea-US Free Trade Agreement.

“We would like to call upon all parties to stop the unnecessary confrontation and approach this issue in a mature manner with a view to providing the kind of service that the citizens of Seoul deserve,” Allen Penn, Head Of Asia Operations for Uber, said in a statement last week.

Today’s news suggests that there is no imminent sign that Korean authorities will back down from their position against the company, and it will be interesting to see what comes next in this saga.

### Update:

We’ve received the following statement from Uber, “Uber Technologies respects the Korean legal system and will provide its full cooperation We firmly believe that our service, which connects drivers and riders via an application, is not only legal in Korea, but that it is being welcomed and supported by consumers. At the same time, Uber does not believe it is appropriate for authorities to seek to punish drivers who are trying to make a living through this service. We are confident that the Korean court will uphold a fair and sensible judgement on this case.” ■

*This article originally appeared on TechCrunch: [techcrunch.com/2014/12/23/uber-korea-indictment/?ncid=rss&utm\\_source=feedburner&utm\\_medium=feed&utm\\_campaign=Feed%3A+Techcrunch+%28TechCrunch%29](http://techcrunch.com/2014/12/23/uber-korea-indictment/?ncid=rss&utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+Techcrunch+%28TechCrunch%29)*

# Uber Cheap: Chicago is the Least Expensive City in America for UberX Rides

BY JIM DALLKE, ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED ON CHICAGOINNO

**S**INCE UBER FIRST LAUNCHED IN CHICAGO IN 2011, TAXI COMPANIES HAVE BEEN FURIOUS THAT the startup was able to sidestep some requirements that cab drivers must adhere to, and they worry that Uber's low cost will run them out of business. Uber says it's innovating an industry in need of change, and economists overwhelmingly support taxi/ride-sharing competition.

Regardless of whether you're pro-Uber or pro-cab drivers, one thing is clear: UberX is really cheap in Chicago. In fact, it's cheaper here than anywhere else in the country, Chicago Inno has found. We took pricing data from all of Uber's U.S. cities and found that a 10-mile, 20-minute UberX trip in Chicago was \$14.70, 30 cents behind Houston, the second cheapest city in America.

## 10 Least Expensive U.S. Markets for UberX Rides

In USD, assuming a 10-mile, 20-minute UberX trip, based on rates posted on Uber.com as of Oct. 3, 2014



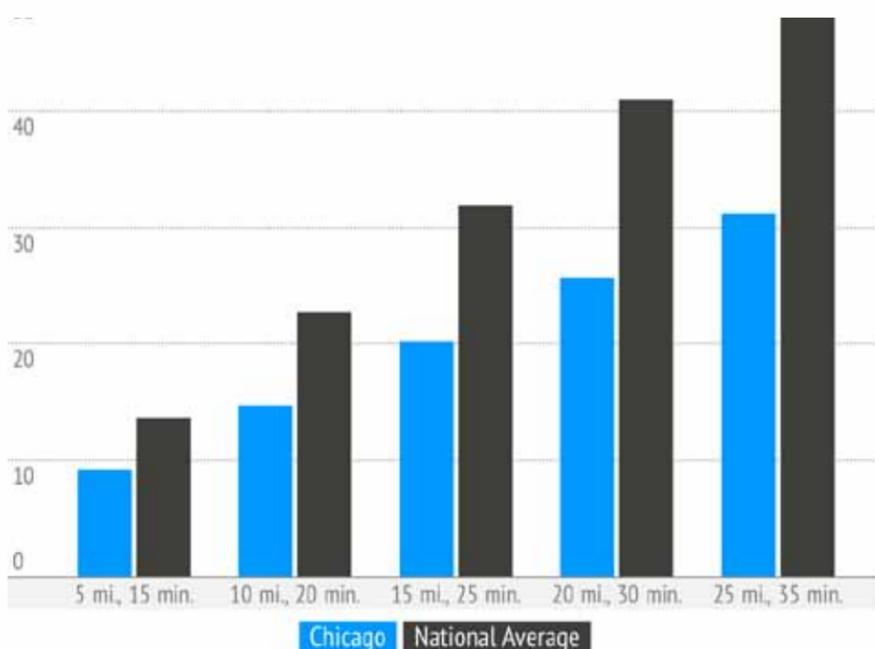
Created with [Datawrapper](#)

Source: [Uber](#). [Get the data](#)

UberX charges a \$1.70 base fare, \$0.20 per minute and \$0.90 per mile in Chicago. Also factored into the Chicago rate is a \$1 safe ride fee and \$0.30 City of Chicago Transit Tax and Accessibility fee. Cancellation fees are \$5, and a the minimum fare is \$2.70.

Looking at the U.S. as a whole, UberX rides in Chicago fall well below the national average with rides as short as 5 minutes or as long at 25 minutes.

## Cost of an UberX Ride in USD



On the opposite end of the spectrum, the most expensive market for UberX is the Hamptons, followed by New Orleans and the Jersey Shore. The same 10-mile, 20-minute trip in Chicago that runs \$14.70 costs \$63.50 in the Hamptons, \$49.50 in New Orleans, and \$38 in Jersey.

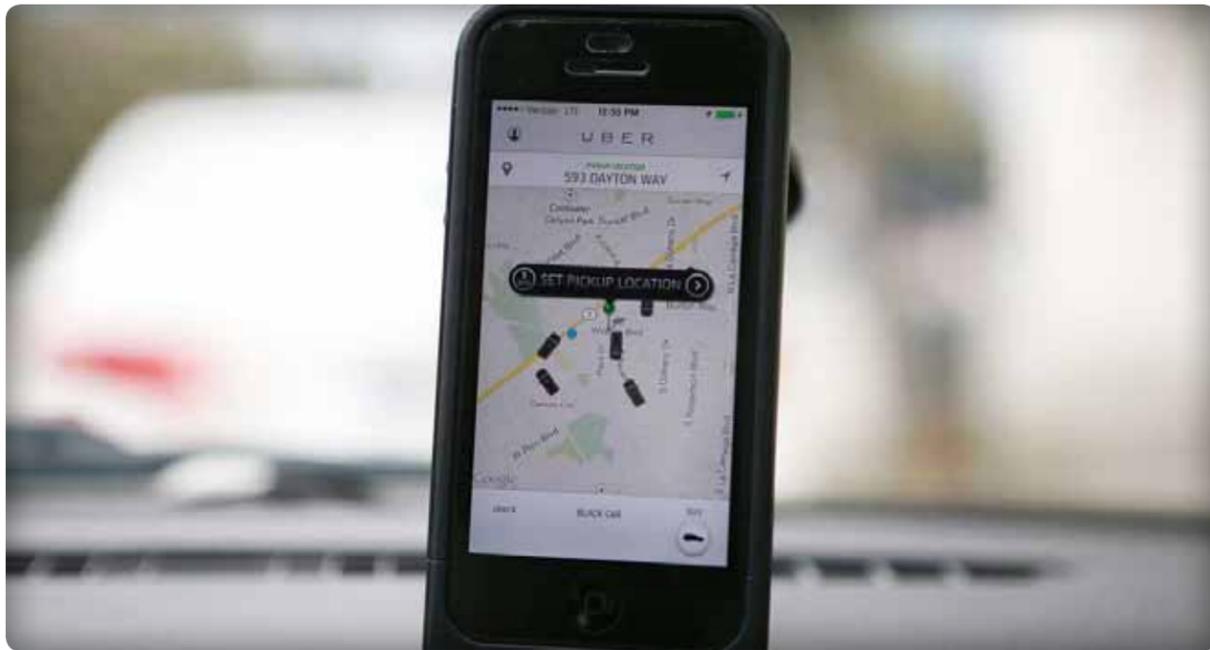
In Chicago, Uber had cut its prices by 25 percent as a summer promotion, but in August it announced that prices would be permanently 15 percent lower city-wide. (Also this summer, Uber promised hundreds of jobs if Gov. Pat Quinn vetoed a controversial ridesharing bill. Quinn did and the ride-sharing giant scooped up a 58,000 square foot office space in the West Loop, announcing it will bring 420 jobs to the city by 2016).

### CHICAGO CABDRIVERS! Be alert and aware where and how you are driving! Here are the locations of: **Speeding Camera Locations throughout Chicago**

- Abbott Park, 49 E. 95th St.
- Bogan Tech High School, 3939 W. 79th St.
- Burr Elementary School, 1621 W. Wabansia Ave.
- Challenger Park, 1100 W. Irving Park Rd.
- Chicago Agricultural High School, 3807 W. 111th St.
- Christopher Elementary School, 5042 S. Artesian Ave.
- Columbus Park, 500 S. Central Ave.
- Curie High School, 4959 S. Archer Ave.
- Douglas Park, 1401 S. Sacramento Ave.
- Frances Xavier Warde School, 751 N. State St.
- Gage Park, 2415 W. 55th St.
- Garfield Park, 100 N. Central Park Dr.
- Gompers Park, 4222 W. Foster Ave.
- Hancock Elementary School, 4034 W. 56th St.
- Harvard Elementary School, 7525 S. Harvard Ave.
- Horan Park, 3035 W. Van Buren St.
- Horner Park, 2741 W. Montrose Ave.
- Humboldt Park, 1400 N. Humboldt Dr.
- Icci Academy, 6435 W. Belmont Ave.
- Jefferson Park, 4822 N. Long Ave.
- Jones High School, 606 S. State St.
- Lane Tech High School, 2501 W. Addison St.
- Legion Park, 3100 W. Bryn Mawr Ave.
- Lorca Elementary School, 3231 N. Springfield Ave.
- Major Taylor Park, 970 W. 115th St.
- Marquette Park, 6734 S. Kedzie Ave.
- McGuane Park, 2901 S. Poplar Ave.
- McKinley Park, 2210 W. Pershing Rd.
- Merrimac Park, 6343 W. Irving Park Rd.
- Morgan Park High School, 1744 W. Pryor Ave.
- Ogden Park, 429 N. Columbus Dr.
- Orr High School, 730 N. Pulaski Rd.
- Park 499, 3925 E. 104th St.
- Parsons Park, 4701 W. Belmont Ave.
- Pickard Elementary School, 2301 W. 21st Pl.
- Portage Park, 4100 N. Long Ave.
- Prosser Vocational High School, 2148 N. Long Ave.
- Riis Park, 6100 W. Fullerton Ave.
- Roberto Clemente High School, 1147 N. Western Ave.
- Rosenblum Park, 2000 E. 75th St.
- Sauganash Elementary School, 6040 N. Kilpatrick Ave.
- Schaefer Park, 2415 N. Marshfield Ave.
- Senn Park, 5887 N. Ridge Ave.
- Sherman Park, 1307 W. 52nd St.
- St. Genevieve School, 4854 W. Montana St.
- St. Rita High School, 7740 S. Western Ave.
- Union Park, 1501 W. Randolph St.
- Warren Elementary School, 9239 S. Jeffery Ave.
- Washington Park, 5531 S. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Dr.
- Welles Park, 2333 W. Sunnyside Ave
- Broadway and Sunnyside (Target)

# UBER FACING PROBE IN SAN FRANCISCO OVER DRIVERS SHUNNING GUIDE DOGS

BY CHRISTINA FARR



**W**HEN JONATHAN LYENS ORDERED A car on Uber's mobile app, the driver took one look at his service animal and considered taking off.

"I don't usually pick up dogs," Lyens, who is legally blind, recalled the driver saying. "This driver seemed to have no awareness of disability rights laws."

San Francisco regulators and the National Federation of the Blind are looking into claims that drivers for the rides-on-demand service have refused to ferry people with service animals. The federation said it has reached out to members to notify them that two law firms are investigating a series of such claims.

The chorus of complaints from the city's blind community are the latest headache for a five-year-old startup whose rapid growth has earned it a valuation north of \$3 billion, but also its share

of regulatory problems.

The federation will air its concerns during a meeting with Uber next week. Michael Hingson, a member of the California board of directors for the federation who is also legally blind, described the problem as "systemic."

"It's a breach of civil rights," he told Reuters. "Uber ought to be required to obey the same rules as any other transportation service."

Uber isn't the first transport provider the disabled community has targeted. But city officials say it presents a new problem because its size and growth is coming at the expense of taxi services that operate under laws to protect the rights of disabled people.

"We take this feedback very seriously and will deactivate driver partners from the Uber platform who refuse to transport a rider with a service animal," Uber spokeswoman Eva Behrend said.

After filing a complaint to Uber, Lyens got a response that its drivers are "independent contractors and we cannot control their actions." It's unclear if Uber deactivated the driver involved.

## WHAT TO DO?

TRE Legal Practice and Disability Rights Advocates expect to take action against Uber this year. Attorneys told Reuters they want Uber to educate drivers about disability rights, and punish drivers who violate them.

"The outcome is to ensure that people are being investigated against," said TRE Legal's Timothy Elder. "How we get there is flexible."

Uber, which allows users to call up rides from smartphones, is no stranger to legal action. The company was embroiled in a wrongful-death suit this year, filed by the family of a 6-year-old child killed by an Uber driver.

City officials are considering how to regulate up-and-coming services such as Uber and Lyft. Regulators have struggled to determine whether they should be responsible for what happens after riders get in the car.

The latest complaints struck a nerve in a city known for tolerance. During a hearing in March, San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency official Christiane Hayashi said the city is in a disability community transit "crisis" with traditional cabbies moving over to these services in droves.

In September, the California Public Utilities Commission requested that steps be taken to "ensure that there is no divide between service provided to the able and disabled communities."

Lyft did not respond to requests for comment. ■

*This article originally appeared: [reuters.com/article/2014/05/21/us-uber-blind-idUSKBN0E100J20140521](http://reuters.com/article/2014/05/21/us-uber-blind-idUSKBN0E100J20140521)*

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  - \$10 co-pay for getting the best deal
  - \$60 discount on representation at Hearings
- Consultation on lease fraud and other driver issues

## Instructions for membership:

- Fill out form below
- Bring to our office at 2040 N. Milwaukee to make a payment and get your picture taken for your Membership card
- Payment is \$120 per year (partial payment plans available)
- Office hours: Mon-Tues-Wed 1-7 pm
- Or call for appointment: 773-342-8822

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NAME: (print) \_\_\_\_\_ GENDER: MALE/FEMALE

CHAUFFEUR LIC. #: \_\_\_\_\_ Lease Driver: Yes No Shift: Day Night Mix/Swing

Street Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Apt. # \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Cell Ph.: \_\_\_\_\_ Home: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Yearly Membership: \$120 (partial OK)

Payment type: cash/credit/money order/check Amount received: \_\_\_\_\_ Due: \_\_\_\_\_ (within 6 weeks)