

UNITED SPINAL^{NOW}

Cuomo, NYS Legislature Won't Require Uber/Rideshare Access

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Uber and other rideshare companies got the governor and the legislature to do their bidding. Gov. Andrew Cuomo included state-wide rideshare authorization in a budget bill, so its provisions would receive less scrutiny than a typical piece of legislation.

Uber operates 60,000 inaccessible vehicles in New York City. There are only 13,500 yellow cabs. Half were to be accessible (pursuant to a settlement with United Spinal and other disability organizations) by 2020.

Uber's success has resulted in fewer yellow cabs since there aren't enough drivers and passengers to keep cabs operating in the face of Uber competition. As Uber replaces yellow cabs with inaccessible vehicles, taxi access is diminished.

Gov. Cuomo, an early supporter of accessible taxis, abandoned the disability community and sided with the rideshares as he pushed through a budget bill, creating an insurance product for rideshare drivers, authorizing a study about the need for wheelchair access, and pre-empting local regulation of rideshares unless a local governmental entity opts out.

For two years, United Spinal and Independent Living Centers from around the state have lobbied the legislature and the governor's office explaining why Uber access is vitally necessary. This year the governor's office barely acknowledged our position.

Assemblymember Kevin Cahill, (D-Kingston), who wanted localities to be able to regulate rideshares, probably believes that since the budget bill allows this, he did the disability community a favor – but think about the likely result.

A local disability community in an upstate town wants to require rideshare access. The town passes a law requiring access. Uber says "Thank you, but no thank you. We will operate somewhere else." Uber is known to pull out of communities when it doesn't like the regulatory scheme. Austin, Texas lost Uber because the city required background checks for drivers and Uber didn't want to comply.

All citizens will lose Uber service because the local government wanted access. It is unlikely the disability community will win this fight.

Even worse, Uber vehicles registered in Westchester and Nassau counties will flood Manhattan with vehicles unknown to the City's Taxi & Limousine Commission.

Unlike rideshare vehicles registered in N.Y.C, they will not need special license plates. These cars will clog N.Y.C. streets and dilute the ratio of accessible yellow cabs to other for-hire vehicles.

Uber's corporate culture has been discussed in the media, but little attention has been paid to its refusal to make itself accessible. Sexism and low wages capture the headlines, while the rights of people with disabilities are overlooked by Uber, government and media.

Rideshare companies spent quite a bit on lobbying. Uber spent \$711,000 in January and February for TV, mail and billboard advertising and lobbyists. Lyft spent about \$60,000.

People with disabilities are doubly cursed by the horrible existing taxi services in upstate New York and by Uber's willingness to spend whatever it takes on lobbying to subvert the rights of wheelchair users. Residents want Uber and the legislature wants to satisfy voters. To do the most good for the most people, legislators too easily discriminated against wheelchair users.

Inevitably, paratransit and Medicaid-funded transportation systems in Buffalo, Albany, Rochester, Syracuse, etc. will start using Uber for their ambulatory passengers because the service can be delivered less expensively. Transit systems will wonder why our elected officials didn't require access, as will county departments of social services that provide Medicaid funded ambulettes to wheelchair users.

United Spinal and the disability community told the legislature and the governor's office about cost-saving to government if rideshares were made to provide accessible service.

We were ignored, but that doesn't mean we were wrong.