

Testimony of Saibou Sidibe, Uber driver and NYTWA Organizer  
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My name is Saibou Sidibe. I am originally from Ivory Coast. I have been a driver since 2002. I started driving yellow and because I had less time to share with my children, I switched to Uber in 2016. I was expecting to see a change in my working condition as an app driver because I was told that by driving for app base companies I will be my own boss. That sounds nice. You think you will make more money, like any other boss, and no one will tell you what to do. But unfortunately this was not the case for many drivers like me who are driving for app base companies like Uber, Lyft etc.

Some days, I would leave home earlier at 5 in the morning while children are sleeping and get back around 8 pm while they are ready to go to bed. And this is the life of most app base driver. I have been organizing people from my community since I came to the USA. Today I can tell that the West African community is the most growing one among taxi drivers. I am in a better position to tell how driving in NYC is very frustrating. Indeed since I started a job with NYTWA as a staff member while working as a part time driver, I see how drivers are suffering.

As a driver, you don't get paid when you are sick. A pregnant women driver will not get any compensation while she stays home to take care of her baby after giving birth. Drivers do not get any paid vacation. Drivers don't get any health insurance from any companies they are working for. Today app based companies are telling driver that they are their own boss. But at the same time, they controlled every ride a driver pickup; they decide when a driver should work now with their new log off policy. They can fire a driver by deactivating him any time they want.

These app based companies, drivers don't have any right. Today even if you don't get deactivated, or fired in other words, you will be exposed to a log off which is new policy that app base created to block a driver from working for a certain amount of time in certain zone. Consequences of this new policy is that drivers are not only losing income for less working, they also have to work more additional time to compensate the length of time when their account are blocked. Driver are being assaulted while working with no protection, app companies don't even give a chance to drivers to appeal their decisions in manner requested by law.

Before the TLC passed a rule on the minimum rates the companies have to pay us on each mile and minute, many of my friends and I were not even taking home minimum wage per hour at the end of a shift. Imagine working 60 hours a week for companies that are worth billions of dollars and the drivers, after paying for gasoline, car payment, insurance,

repairs and maintenance could not even say they were making the same as workers at McDonald's or Wal-Mart. These companies, when they first started, gave us bonuses for signing up and even had surge, saying they would pay us extra for working during high demand, even if the customer didn't pay them that much for the fare. They promised us more money, more opportunity, and no one to harass or demand extra bribes from us like a garage dispatcher. That's why so many of us signed up with them. Some of us left other jobs; many even bought brand new cars and learned to drive as a professional for the first time. But soon, with more cars on the road and no guarantee to protect how much we were earning, everything started to change.

These companies, with billions of dollars, could do whatever they wanted. There were no laws to protect the drivers. We were never our own boss. We were never their partners. We were their workers that they could control and from who they could make money. But we the drivers received nothing in return for it.

Today we are here because we have a strong hope that drivers working conditions can change. To do that, we need protection under the law. Why should we not get the rights that 9 million other brothers and sisters workers in New York State have? What is less about us as workers that the state would think we don't need minimum wage to feed our families, or paid time off when our children are sick or a family member needs care? We have the same human problems as every other worker in this state. And like every other worker, we also make money for our boss. They control our ability to earn a living. And our labor makes it possible for them to become billionaires. But they should not get to do so at our expense.

We have hope that New York State will do like California and protect all workers and treat all workers like we are one and equal. We also have hope that like other workers, as employees, we will also have the right to make our own union that will represent drivers' interests at the table and the company will be required by law to negotiate with fairly.

We drivers, we work long hours, with no safety, no security. On holidays and weekends, we work. When the rest of the city is resting and sleeping, we work. When the executives at our companies are on vacation or watching the stock market, we work. We work hard. We just ask you to see us and see that we are special, and that means, under the law; we should be treated as equal. Thank you.