

Dear Lawmakers,

My name is Jennifer Lyon, and I have been a rideshare driver in Oregon for the past six months. I am submitting this testimony to advocate for fair pay, deactivation protections, and essential benefits for drivers, with a particular focus on the urgent need for gender-matching laws to ensure the safety of women and marginalized communities. I ask you to support the rights and protections in Senate Bill 1166.

Personal Experience

I began driving for Uber after my car was stolen, and another driver informed me that I could rent a vehicle through Uber's rental program to work and regain mobility. However, my experience as a rideshare driver has been fraught with challenges, exploitation, and personal safety risks that highlight the urgent need for legislative intervention.

Challenges Faced as a Driver

Rideshare driving has been anything but empowering. I have experienced severe financial exploitation at the hands of rental companies like Hertz and Avis, which have stolen money from me and engaged in deceptive practices. In many instances, Uber's pay structure was so low that I couldn't even cover my weekly rental fees, forcing me to borrow money just to stay on the road. Some weeks, despite working long hours, I made no profit at all.

Additionally, as a female driver, I have been subjected to rampant sexual harassment and abuse. Men have grabbed my breasts, exposed themselves, and made inappropriate comments and advances. When I attempted to report these incidents, Uber either ignored my concerns or treated me as though I was the problem. The fear of being deactivated prevents me from defending myself or setting boundaries with passengers.

Fair Pay: A Critical Need

The current pay structure is deeply unfair and misleading. Uber presents earnings in a pie chart that claims drivers take home a significant share of profits. However, their calculation does not account for our expenses—gas, rental fees, maintenance, and insurance—which often leave us operating at a loss. In my experience, there were three separate weeks when I had to borrow money just to cover my rental fees, and in many cases, I worked just to break even. Fair pay would drastically change my life by allowing me to cover basic expenses and improve my overall well-being.

Deactivation Protections: A Matter of Survival

I have not yet been deactivated, but I have been threatened with it multiple times. The fear of sudden deactivation forces drivers like me to tolerate abuse and harassment because speaking up could result in losing our only source of income. Drivers need protections that ensure we are not unfairly penalized for protecting ourselves from harm.

Gender-Matching: A Solution to Protect Female Drivers and Passengers

Women are vastly underrepresented in rideshare due to safety concerns, and the current model disproportionately places us at risk. In Portland, Oregon, Lyft offers a feature called "Women+ Connect," allowing female and non-binary passengers to request female drivers. However, due to the lack of female drivers, it is not guaranteed. Uber has piloted similar

programs in other regions, but not in ours. Even when these programs exist, they fail because rideshare companies do not prioritize increasing the number of female drivers to meet demand.

The problem is not just that female passengers aren't safe—it's that female drivers aren't safe. However, there are plenty of female passengers available to enable gender matching for drivers immediately.

Immediate Legislative Action Needed:

1. **Mandatory Gender Matching for Female Drivers:** All female drivers should be guaranteed female passengers starting immediately. This simple step would dramatically improve safety for female drivers and encourage more women to enter the industry.
2. **Guaranteed Gender Matching for Passengers Within a Timeline:** Legislation should require Uber and Lyft to increase their female driver pool within a set period to guarantee gender matching for passengers who request it. The key word here is "guaranteed" because current policies only offer it when convenient, allowing male drivers to be assigned even when female drivers are available.

If gender matching for female drivers were implemented now, it would create a safer working environment and attract more women to rideshare, increasing female representation in the workforce. The implementation of this solution would significantly improve conditions and remove the current barriers that prevent women from working in this industry.

Benefits Like Sick Pay and Protections

Due to the lack of benefits, I have had to work while sick because I could not afford to take time off. If I do not work, I cannot pay my rental fees, which creates an unsustainable cycle. Proper sick pay and protections would allow drivers to maintain their health without financial ruin.

Why Lawmakers Must Act Now

The rideshare industry is not just about convenience; it is a public service that must be regulated to ensure the safety and fair treatment of drivers. Women, trans individuals, and marginalized communities are being assaulted and harassed, and existing protections are woefully inadequate. Gender-matching laws, fair pay standards, and deactivation protections are not just requests—they are necessities for survival and dignity in this industry.

I urge lawmakers to take immediate action to implement policies that ensure safety, fairness, and equity for all rideshare drivers. The rideshare industry will not self-regulate; only legislative action can bring about the necessary change.

Thank you for your time and attention to this critical issue.

Jennifer Lyon
Uber driver