



# City of Seattle

Edward Murray, Mayor

## Seattle Immigrant and Refugee Commission

Jennifer Calleja and Shree Ram Dahal, Co-Chairs

DATE: February 13, 2014

TO: Mayor Edward B. Murray  
Council President Tim Burgess  
Councilmember Sally Bagshaw  
Councilmember Sally Clark  
Councilmember Jean Godden  
Councilmember Bruce Harrell  
Councilmember Nick Licata  
Councilmember Mike O'Brien  
Councilmember Tom Rasmussen  
Councilmember Kshama Sawant

FROM: Seattle Immigrant and Refugee Commission

RE: Rideshare and Taxi regulation impact on Immigrant and Refugee Communities

Dear City Council and Mayor,

We appreciate the opportunity to share our thoughts with you about the proposed legislation around Taxis/For-Hire vehicles. As you probably know, 89% of Taxi and For-Hire drivers are immigrants or refugees.<sup>1</sup> The Council is proposing legislation for Taxis and For-Hire vehicles, as well as new ridesharing companies or Transport Network Companies (TNCs), which will soon be affecting our communities. We believe that there will be an impact to the immigrant and refugee community on both sides of this issue.

On one side of the debate, For-Hire drivers feel that they are over-regulated and competing against companies who have no regulations, like UBERx and Lyft. If there are no caps on TNCs, they are worried the competition will be too great; they feel that they are already seeing a down turn in their business. We know drivers that are immigrants and refugees who have newly come to the country and are trying to make a living. Some have invested tens of thousands of dollars in taxi licenses and we are concerned about them.

On the other side of the debate, some TNC drivers were formerly taxi drivers who used to lease a taxi. They have become independent. It seems that the TNCs have created self-employment opportunities with low initial investment. The city should let that innovation develop.

The Commission believes that regulations should be fair to the For-Hire drivers, promote safe driving and promote vehicle maintenance. Many low income immigrants and refugees have poor credit history, or are in vulnerable situations, or do not have bank accounts and operate with cash

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<sup>1</sup> Godden, Jean. "Seattle Wades into the Taxi Tangle." Crosscut.com, posted 8-1-2008, retrieved 2-13-14. Found at: <http://crosscut.com/2008/08/01/seattle-city-hall/16320/Seattle-wades-into-taxi-tangle/>.

and money orders. TNCs - once held to the same standards of safety and licensing - should be able to pick up street hails and accept cash payment. We believe that the ability of picking up street hails and accepting cash payment increases access for all consumers.

The Commission would like to request more time to weigh-in on various caps and increase of taxi licenses which are considered in the legislation. We hope that the legislation will take into account the concerns we have raised. Ultimately, we believe that everyone should be held to the same standards and regulations – this is about leveling the playing field so that all members of our community can succeed.

Sincerely,



Jennifer Calleja, Co-Chair  
Immigrant and Refugee Commission



Shree Ram Dahal, Co-Chair  
Immigrant and Refugee Commission