

Plaintiffs push back against Uber's attempt to take sexual assault case to private arbitration

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Lawyers representing the nine women suing Uber over alleged sexual assault are now pushing back against the company's attempts to take the lawsuit to private arbitration.

“Uber is frantic to deny Jane Does and thousands of female victims their right to access our judicial system, as demonstrated by Uber’s recent shameful attempt to force this action into arbitration immediately,” reads a complaint from Wigdor LLP — the group pursuing a class-action lawsuit against the ride-hailing platform on behalf the women, who say they were assaulted by Uber drivers.

BuzzFeed News first reported on the complaint which was filed Thursday.

Private arbitration would move the suit out of public courts. The case would then instead be settled privately between Wigdor and Uber’s lawyers. Critics of the practice say that it gives companies, who often take advantage of the arbitration system, an unfair advantage and argue that it shields them from the negative publicity that can come from a court ruling. Companies who defend the practice say that it’s a cheaper and quicker way to solve legal disputes.

“The allegations brought forth in this case are important to us and we take them very seriously,” an Uber spokesperson told BuzzFeed. “Arbitration is the appropriate venue for this case because it allows the plaintiffs to publicly speak out as much as they want and have control over their individual privacy at the same time.”

Susan Fowler, the former Uber employee who sounded the alarm on an alleged culture of sexual harassment and mistreatment of women at the company, filed amicus briefs last August in support of a three Supreme Court cases challenging forced arbitrations.

Fowler and other critics of the practice argue that consumers and employees are disadvantaged when they sign forced arbitration clauses in employment contracts and terms of use, which effectively prevent them from launching lawsuits against companies they have disputes with.