

# Women accusing Uber drivers of sexual assault demand their stories be heard in court, not arbitration

 [abcnews.go.com/US/women-accusing-uber-drivers-sexual-assault-demand-stories/story](https://abcnews.go.com/US/women-accusing-uber-drivers-sexual-assault-demand-stories/story)

More than a dozen women, who have accused Uber drivers of sexual assault, penned an open letter Thursday demanding the ride-sharing company let them pursue their claims in court rather than force them to resolve their cases privately through arbitration.

Fourteen women, who allege to be victims of sexual assault, rape, sexual harassment and gender-motivated violence at the hands of Uber drivers, sent the letter directly to the company's 11-member board of directors, requesting that they be voluntarily released from the mandatory arbitration provision in the Uber mobile app's consumer agreement.

The women -- who identify themselves as Katherine, Lauren, Sophia, K.B., Rachel, Jane Doe 6, Stephanie, Joy, Jennifer, Sasha, Annie, Elizabeth, Briana, and Addison -- argue that "secret arbitration" goes against Uber's declared mission to help "make streets safer" as well as one of its mantras, "We do the right thing. Period."

The women claim in the letter that "silencing" their stories is a disservice to customers who deserve to know about their "horrific" experiences.

"Forcing female riders, as a condition of using Uber's app, to pursue claims of sexual assault and rape in secret arbitration proceedings does not 'make streets safer.' In fact, it does the opposite," the women write. "Silencing our stories deprives customers and potential investors from the knowledge that our horrific experiences are part of a widespread problem at Uber. This is not doing the 'right thing.'"

The letter continues, "Secret arbitration takes away a woman's right to a trial by a jury of her peers and provides a dark alley for Uber to hide from the justice system, the media, and public scrutiny."

An Uber spokesperson confirmed to ABC News that the company had received the letter Thursday and said in a statement, "Sexual assault has no place anywhere and we are committed to doing our part to end this violence."

The spokesperson also noted that the arbitration provision allows plaintiffs to publicly speak out as much as they want and have control over their individual privacy at the same time.

Last year in mid-November, two women filed a class-action lawsuit against Uber in the United States District Court for the Northern District of California on behalf of themselves and other women who allege similar incidents with Uber drivers. Jane Doe 1 and Jane Doe 2, as they are called in the complaint, identify themselves respectively as Katherine and Lauren in Thursday's letter as they recount their stories.

Katherine, a Miami resident, alleges that an Uber driver entered her apartment without her consent, then sexually assaulted and raped her after driving her home in the early morning hours of Oct. 15, 2016.

Lauren, a Los Angeles resident, alleges that an Uber driver sexually assaulted her when she fell asleep in the backseat on the night of Jan. 18, 2017. Then, he allegedly followed her into her home and raped her.

The letter also shares the allegations of Stephanie in New York City, Addison in Los Angeles and Annie in San Jose, which was not detailed in the lawsuit.

The complaint states that Uber uses "low-cost, woefully inadequate background checks" for their drivers and does not monitor drivers for "violent or inappropriate conduct after they are hired."

Even after allegations of sexual misconduct have emerged against Uber drivers, the lawsuit claims that: "Nothing meaningful has been done to make rides safer for passengers -- especially women."

The same day the lawsuit was filed, an Uber spokesperson told ABC News at the time that the company was reviewing the complaint and it takes the allegations seriously.

"Uber received this complaint today and we are in the process of reviewing it," the spokesperson said in a statement on Nov. 14, 2017. "These allegations are important to us and we take them very seriously."

Uber CEO Dara Khosrowshahi has said the company is taking a hard look at the allegations. Earlier this month, Khosrowshahi [announced new safety features and improvements](#) to Uber's screening process, including a new emergency button that will connect riders directly with 911 and re-running criminal and motor vehicle background checks each year.

For this year's Sexual Awareness Month, Uber [teamed up with several organizations](#) "to come together to embrace our voices and commit to help preventing sexual assault and domestic violence."

The company has until May 4 to respond in court to the complaint. Separately, a judge at some point will rule on Uber's motion to compel arbitration.

The women wrote that Uber, in response to the lawsuit, is "aggressively trying to force our stories of sexual violence by Uber drivers into confidential arbitration." They went on to write that the "senseless violence" will continue if the ride-share company silences their stories.

"We, as women, think that forcing female riders that have suffered rape, sexual assault, and gender-motivated violence to pursue their claims in arbitration rather than in court serves to facilitate more incidents of such crimes and victimizes women a second time," the women write in the letter. "Silencing our stories and the stories of countless other female victims emboldens

predators by failing to hold them accountable. This vicious cycle perpetuates senseless violence. Uber's condition of forced arbitration makes future suffering by women like us a near certainty unless Uber decides to 'do the right thing' and change."

Jeanne M. Christensen, one of the attorneys at Wigdor LLP representing the women, said Uber must disclose to potential investors "the magnitude of the problem" with its drivers allegedly sexually assaulting women riders, as the ride-hailing giant moves towards its initial public offering or IPO.

"The critical first step in such transparency is to let our clients litigate their claims through the court system," Christensen said in a statement to ABC News, "and not bully them into the secret halls of confidential arbitration."