

Lawsuit accuses Uber of neglecting passenger safety



Uber's headquarters in San Francisco.

By Nicole Dungca / Globe Staff October 08, 2015

Two women, including one in Boston, are accusing Uber of neglect and fraud after they were allegedly sexually assaulted by Uber drivers in two separate incidents, according to a federal lawsuit filed Thursday in Northern California.

In the lawsuit, two Jane Does accuse the San Francisco company of misleading women by regularly marketing the company as a safe transportation option, then failing to appropriately screen their drivers to make sure female passengers are safe.

Lawyers for the two Jane Does say that Uber's claims of safety are "false and hollow," and liken using the app to "electronic hitchhiking."

"By marketing heavily toward young women who have been drinking while claiming that rider safety is its #1 priority, Uber is instead putting these women at risk," the complaint said.

Douglas Wigdor, a lawyer based in New York who is representing the women, said they are filing the lawsuit after going through "horrific experiences that nobody should have to go through."

“They’re hoping that Uber will change its policies and practices to not have this happen to another woman,” he said.

The lawsuit, [which was first reported by CNET](#), mentions an incident in Boston, during which a woman used Uber to arrange a ride for herself and her friends on Feb. 8. After dropping off her friends, the driver took Jane Doe 1 off her route and allegedly sexually assaulted her. The driver, Abderrahim Dakiri, was charged with indecent assault and battery after the woman reported the incident.

The lawsuit also mentions a second incident in South Carolina, where a driver also took another woman on a detour and allegedly raped her.

Lawyers for the victims are asking Uber to grant them unspecified damages that would be determined in a trial.

It also asks Uber to overhaul what it calls the company’s “woefully inadequate safety measures.”

Among several measures, the lawsuit calls for Uber to include full-service customer support centers, mandate tamper-proof video cameras in cars, give customers the ability to choose a female Uber driver, and mandate the use of a fingerprint-based background check.

Wigdor said Uber officials are making conscious decisions to ignore safety measures that could prevent sexual assaults.

“The concern is not the safety of its passengers, but to make sure they can get a foothold in these various markets and to grow their company,” he said.

In a statement, an Uber spokesman said the drivers no longer work for the company.

“Our thoughts remain with the victims of these two terrible incidents,” the statement read. “We proactively worked with law enforcement in Massachusetts and South Carolina at the time to share information and aid their investigations.”

Opponents of the growing ride-hailing app market often allege that companies such as Uber conduct background checks that aren’t as complete as those for taxi drivers. But Uber says that its criminal background screening process is rigorous and safe.