

Women Blame Uber for Alleged Sexual Assaults

By NICHOLAS IOVINO
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SAN FRANCISCO (CN) - Two women who say they were sexually assaulted by Uber drivers claim in court that the ride-hailing company prioritizes profits over passenger safety.

Two Jane Does claim they were sexually assaulted by drivers in Boston and South Carolina, despite a corporate marketing campaign that promotes Uber as one of the safest options for getting home after a night of drinking.

They sued Uber in Federal Court on Thursday over claims of negligent hiring and supervision, fraud, battery, infliction of emotional distress and false imprisonment for their confinement in vehicles.

The lawsuit points to corporate marketing slogans, such as "Drink Up & Uber On," and says the company falsely promotes safety as its primary concern.

"By marketing heavily toward young women who have been drinking while claiming that rider safety is its number one priority, Uber is instead putting these women at risk," the 52-page complaint states.

Uber's "reckless expansion" requires the company to recruit and employ thousands of non-professional drivers, the lawsuit alleges.

As of June 2015, the company employed more than one-million drivers, and it claims to be adding hundreds of thousands of new drivers each month, according to the complaint.

The two women say opening the Uber app and ordering a ride has become the modern equivalent of "electronic hitchhiking."

The complaint also gives blame to Uber's deficient background checks, which have allowed people convicted of murder, kidnapping, assault, robbery, identity theft and sexually exploiting children to pass through Uber's screening process, according to another lawsuit filed by district attorneys in San Francisco and Los Angeles.

"Rather than notify riders of these failures, Uber fills its website with pictures of smiling young women entering and exiting vehicles, who are meant to appear 'safe,'" Does' complaint states.

One of the female plaintiffs says she was sexually assaulted by an Uber driver in Boston in February of this year. After dropping off her friends, the 38-year-old, 200-lb. driver told the woman he "really liked her" and then forcibly kissed and groped the 20-year-old passenger after driving her 15 minutes off route from her destination.

"She was unable to push him off," the complaint states, but she eventually managed to unlock the door and flee the vehicle. She ran to a friend's house, whose door was locked, but a passerby noticed her and together they called 911, according to the lawsuit.

The driver was arrested and Uber refunded the woman \$27 for her ride, she claims.

The other woman says she was "viciously raped" by an Uber driver in Charleston, S.C., in August. The driver took her in the wrong direction away from her home and suggested that she perform oral sex as payment for the ride, she claims. The driver then proceeded to "viciously rape her and threaten her with harm multiple times," according to the complaint.

It is unclear whether the Charleston driver was also arrested but the lawsuit says a police officer noted that the alleged victim had "bruising throughout her body."

"Sadly, Uber has proven time and time again that it is willing to sacrifice the safety and well-being of its customers - particularly its female customers - for the sake of padding its corporate bottom-line," the complaint states.

The lawsuit also cites reports of women that were allegedly sexually assaulted by Uber drivers in New York City, New Jersey, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Washington D.C., Chicago, Atlanta, Philadelphia, Dallas, Houston, Orlando, Wisconsin, Paris, India and China.

The two women seek immediate injunctive relief ordering Uber to overhaul its "woefully inadequate safety measures

so that no woman has to ever endure what they have had to unfortunately experience."

The lawsuit asks the court to order Uber to enact a series of safety reforms, including 24-hour customer support, GPS tracking for all drivers, disabled child locks for all vehicles, in-person interviews for drivers, tamper-proof video cameras in cars, the option to request a female driver, periodic background checks on drivers, in-app panic buttons, and employing experts to investigate complaints, among other requests.

The women seek a declaratory judgment, permanent injunction, punitive damages, and damages for physical, mental and reputational harm.

Uber, which was launched in San Francisco in June 2010, made \$2.8 billion by 2015, and the company is expected to bring in \$10 billion in revenue by the end of this year, according to the complaint.

The two women are represented by lead attorneys Douglas Widgor in New York City and Jamie Couche of Anderson & Poole in San Francisco.

Uber Technologies did not immediately respond to a request for comment.