

Uber faces lawsuit in US over two alleged sexual assaults by drivers

High-profile law firm brings action on behalf of one woman from Boston and another from South Carolina, and says Uber ‘fails to protect female passengers

[Lauren Gambino](#) in New York

Thursday 8 October 2015 19.20 EDT



The lawsuit claims that ‘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’. Photograph: Quique Garcia/AFP/Getty Images

The law firm that represented the hotel maid who [said she was sexually assaulted](#) by [Dominique Strauss-Kahn](#) and a [woman from Delhi](#) who said she was raped and beaten after hailing an Uber driver last December has filed a lawsuit against the controversial taxi app on behalf of two female passengers.

The passengers accuse Uber drivers of sexual assault, according to [a court filing](#) on Thursday.

In response to the suit, [Uber](#) said it had worked with law enforcement in both cases, and said “both drivers have been permanently removed from the platform”.

The suit, filed in US district court in San Francisco by Wigdor, a New York law firm, alleges that Uber targets its marketing toward women who have been drinking yet fails to protect female passengers by not adequately screening drivers and routinely hiring drivers with criminal histories.

“What Uber does not share with riders is that making the choice to hail a ride after drinking also puts them in peril from the Uber drivers themselves,” the complaint says.

“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 suit alleges that “negligence, fraud and misleading statements” led to the sexual assaults, which it says “humiliated, degraded, violated and robbed [the plaintiffs] of their dignity”.

The suit seeks unspecified damages and a permanent injunction against Uber to improve its safety measures.

“It is our hope that this case sends a strong message to Uber that no woman should have to be physically violated because a company has decided to put profits over safety,” said Douglas Wigdor, the founding partner at Wigdor, in a statement.

According to the suit, the first assault took place in [Boston](#) at around 2.30am on 8 February 2015, after a friend of the first plaintiff, listed as Jane Doe 1, ordered an Uber car.

The Uber driver first dropped off her friends, who lived together, the suit says, and then proceeded to travel off-route. The driver began to grope the woman at a red light, according to the complaint. He then forcibly kissed her.

She sent frantic texts to her friends, saying the driver was trying to “rape” her and asking them to “call for help”. Eventually, the suit says, she managed to unlock the car door and escape.

The suit says the second woman, identified as Jane Doe 2, was driven to a bar in Charleston with friends on 9 August 2015. According to the complaint, the driver followed them into the bar and after several hours offered to take them home.

After dropping off her male friend first, the Uber driver then drove the woman to a remote parking lot where he proceeded to “viciously rape” her, according to the filing. After the attack, Jane Doe 2 escaped and called the police.

In a statement issued on Thursday, an Uber spokesperson said: “Our thoughts remain with the victims of these two terrible incidents.

“We proactively worked with law enforcement in Massachusetts and [South Carolina](#) at the time to share information and aid their investigations. Both drivers have been permanently removed from the platform.”

The taxi app is valued at more than \$50bn, making it the most valuable of the new “sharing economy” tech companies. But while investors have poured in money, Uber has been dogged by controversy.

Dozens of passengers from around the world have alleged sexual assaults by Uber drivers. Cases have arisen in France, China, Canada and India, where a woman’s allegation that she [was brutally raped](#) by her Uber driver set off widespread protests and [led to a ban on the service in Delhi](#).