

Women Suing Over Rape Challenge Uber's Move for Arbitration

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Women suing Uber Technologies Inc. over claims that it's failed to protect thousands of passengers from sexual misconduct by drivers are fighting back against the ride-hailing giant's move to force them into arbitration.

The women alleged Thursday that rather than respond in public court proceedings to allegations that it puts profit over safety, Uber is trying to hide in "the soundless halls of arbitration."

"Forced arbitration prevents sexual violence survivors, like Jane Doe, from discussing their cases publicly, presenting their claims to a jury of their peers, and consequently, exposing evidence that Uber desperately wants to keep secret," according to a revised version of a class-action complaint filed in San Francisco federal court in November.

The original complaint was brought on behalf of two unidentified women who claim they were assaulted by their drivers. The amended complaint adds seven more women.

Uber contends the women consented to arbitration as part of the terms of agreement when they signed up for the app. The company disputes that the arbitration process would silence the women.

"The allegations brought forth in this case are important to us and we take them very seriously," a spokesman for Uber said in a statement. "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."

Jeanne Christensen, a lawyer for the women with New York law firm Wigdor LLP, responded that her clients "already have control over their privacy and they want to litigate in federal court in SF."