

Testimony of David Yassky
NYC Taxi & Limousine Commissioner/Chair
INTRO 521, sponsored by CM Vacca and Rose by the request of the Mayor, IN
RELATION TO MANDATORY PENALTIES FOR TAXICAB AND OTHER DRIVERS

City Council Transportation Committee
April 27, 2011

Good Afternoon, Chairman Vacca and the members of the City Council Committee on Transportation. I am David Yassky, Chairman of the Taxi and Limousine Commission. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today regarding Intro 521, which would increase penalties for yellow-cab service refusals, yellow-cab overcharges, and For-Hire Vehicle street hails. The Taxi and Limousine Commission strongly supports these changes, and is grateful to Council Members Vacca and Rose for introducing and sponsoring the legislation.

As you and all New Yorkers know, the City's yellow taxis are an internationally-recognized symbol. Taxis are a key part of our City's transportation network, and provide over half a million trips for visitors, residents, and commuters each day. New Yorkers depend on cabs to pick up groceries, make it to an afternoon meeting, or enjoy a night out on the town. Our City's taxi industry makes this service available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, year-round in snow, sleet, heat and rain on New York City streets.

However, yellow-taxi street hail service is mostly unavailable beyond the East River; residents in Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx, Staten Island, and even parts of upper Manhattan do not enjoy this convenience, and also face difficulties hailing a ride to from Manhattan to the outer-boroughs. This is not acceptable. TLC Rules and the City's Administrative Code state that any taxi passenger must be taken anywhere in the five boroughs when they want to. We know service refusals – where drivers refuse to pick up a passenger for who they are, where they are going, or any other host of reasons – are an increasing problem in the City's yellow-cab industry, with more than 500 complaints just in March alone. The TLC has made enforcing this regulation a priority, and given recent events and the Mayor's support for increased enforcement and

penalties, we are thankful that this Committee and the Council as a whole has acted speedily to consider this legislation.

In response, the agency has increased on-street enforcement resources focused on this issue, and we have partnered with Baruch College for more effective enforcement. Students, who are less recognizable to drivers than our enforcement officers, hail a cab and ask to go somewhere outside Manhattan. When the student is refused, TLC officers issue a summons to the driver. The increased fines proposed by this legislation will make these added enforcement efforts more effective, and we believe that the increased penalties will make drivers think twice before refusing a passenger service.

We also want to ensure that passengers pay the correct amount for their trip and enter a vehicle licensed for accepting street hails. That is why we are supporting increased penalties for any overcharge committed by a yellow taxi driver and any illegal street hail committed by a For-Hire Vehicle driver. Intro 521 would increase penalties for any yellow taxi driver who attempts to ask for a tip, request payment beyond the amount shown on the meter, or purposely returns the incorrect amount of change to a passenger who has paid the fare in cash; and it increases the penalties for any For-Hire Vehicle driver that picks up a passenger off the street without first pre-arranging the trip. The increased penalties for illegal street hails is particularly important for us because passengers who enter vehicles not licensed for accepting street hails put themselves at risk. The vehicle will most likely not be properly insured and may be operated by an unlicensed driver. We believe that increasing the penalties for these offenses will help deter yellow taxi drivers from overcharging unsuspecting passengers, and For-Hire Vehicle drivers from illegally picking up off the street.

A key part of the yellow taxi's success is the service that passengers receive. It doesn't matter if you are seeing the sights on your vacation, visiting family in Queens, running to your office uptown, or returning home to Brooklyn, you should be able to take a cab, and know you are paying the right price and getting into a licensed vehicle. The

ability to take a taxi anywhere is one of the top reasons that New Yorkers have the nation's lowest car-ownership rates and some of the country's smallest carbon footprints. We support this legislation, so that all visitors and residents can continue to get from point A to point B regardless of where those points are, and so everyone has access to the world-class service offered by our licensed industries.

This concludes my testimony in support of Intro 521. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify today about a key priority for the TLC and our City. At this time, I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.