

Testimony of Meera Joshi

NYC Taxi & Limousine Commissioner/Chair

Testimony on Intro 82, a Local Law to amend the administrative code of the city of New York, in relation to requiring signs regarding penalties for assaulting taxi and livery drivers.

City Council Transportation Committee

September 3, 2014

Good morning Chairman Rodriguez and members of the City Council Transportation Committee. I am Meera Joshi, Commissioner and Chair of the NYC Taxi and Limousine Commission (TLC). Thank you for inviting me to speak on the proposed item of legislation, Intro. 82, a local law which would warn the public of the penalties for assaulting a taxi or livery driver. I would also like to thank Council Member Lancman for introducing this legislation.

The TLC licenses over 100,000 taxi and for-hire vehicle drivers who travel, on average, more than 100 miles each day as they help New Yorkers and visitors get from one place to another. On the whole, our licensees are safe and responsible drivers, and on September 8, the TLC is recognizing the best of the best, 295 drivers whose name will appear on the first ever Driver Honor Roll. These drivers have not been involved in a crash that caused an injury, have not committed a single traffic violation, and have not violated any TLC safety-related rules within the last five years as a TLC-licensed driver. This is especially important given the context of the legislation that is being considered today. These drivers, and all TLC drivers, deserve protection, even as they keep passengers safe in the backseat. I hope that you will join us on September 8th to honor these outstanding drivers.

The reality is that driving can be a dangerous job. Taxi drivers and for-hire vehicle drivers put in countless hours behind the wheel in order to provide for themselves and their families. But drivers face personal risks. Just a couple of weeks ago, livery drivers Mr. Maoudo Kane and Mr. Aboubacar Bah, were killed in the Bronx. These events are tragic reminders of the risks associated with driving professionally.

Intro. 82 mandates a prominent warning to deter those considering assaulting a driver: "ATTENTION: Assaulting a taxi or livery driver is punishable by up to twenty-five years in prison." It is our hope that this warning will create a moment of reflection, and be enough to prevent assault on a driver.

Drivers of vehicles operating for-hire deserve this help. Today, all MTA subways, busses, and stations include signage alerting the public of the penalties for assaulting an MTA employee. As the driving force behind the third largest mode of transportation in New York City, TLC-licensed drivers should be given the same respect and protection.

We support this legislation, and would like to recommend a couple of small changes to the bill's current language. As it is written today, the legislation only includes taxi and FHV drivers and leaves out commuter van and paratransit drivers, who are also TLC licensees. We suggest the current bill language be redrafted in order for the decal to read: "ATTENTION: Assaulting a TLC-licensed driver is punishable by up to twenty-five years in prison". Making this change would expand the bill to include all TLC-licensed drivers, as they all deserve this level of protection.

This concludes my testimony on Intro 82. Thank you again for giving me the opportunity to testify on this legislation. I would be happy to answer your questions.