

**“New York City Launches Public Awareness Campaign
to Combat Illegal Service Refusals”**



New York City Taxi and Limousine Commission’s Office of Inclusion has launched a new citywide public awareness campaign to combat illegal service refusals in taxis, Uber, Lyft, Via, and other for-hire vehicles. The campaign features ten ads that feature black passengers and encourage the public to report illegal service refusals due to discrimination. You can report a service refusal to the TLC by calling 311, using the 311 app, or visiting the 311 website.

The public awareness campaign is spearheaded by the TLC’s Office of Inclusion, which launched last year to ensure that the riding public receives equal and courteous service from for-hire vehicle and taxi drivers. With support from City Council, the Office of Inclusion’s mission is to ultimately end service refusals and ensure that both drivers and passengers know that everyone in New York City has the right to a ride.

The Inclusion campaign is running in subways, outer-borough buses, ferries, newspapers, and social media. Advertisements are also running at LaGuardia Airport, Terminal B, and JFK Airport, Terminal 2.

It is illegal for a TLC-licensed driver to refuse service because of a passenger's race, ethnicity, cultural background, disability, sexual orientation, or other characteristics of a person's background or identity. But for too long, African-Americans, other communities of color, and passengers with disabilities have been denied equitable taxi and for-hire vehicle service. All passengers have the right to travel with a service animal, and be driven to any destination in NYC, Westchester County, Nassau County, or Newark Airport.

In 2019, the TLC's Consumer Complaint Unit received 2748 complaints about service refusals. Although service refusals are often associated with the taxi industry, the TLC increasingly receives reports from passengers about refusals from drivers who work for app companies like Uber and Lyft and investigated 669 for-hire vehicle refusal complaints last year.

"Transportation is a fundamental right for all New Yorkers and visitors, especially when provided by drivers professionally licensed by our City," said **TLC Commissioner and Chair Aloysee Heredia Jarmoszuk**. "Bias and bigotry resulting in service refusal to People of Color, People with Disabilities, or the LGBTQ community cuts to the very heart of New York City's welcoming embrace of all kinds of people. The TLC's campaign reinforces the simple truth that bigotry is unacceptable and encourages riders to report service refusals as soon as it happens so we can take immediate action."

"No one should be denied a trip because of who they are, and we want New Yorkers and visitors to know they have the right to a ride and the tools to ensure that right. The overwhelming majority of TLC-licensed drivers are professionals who serve all passengers, and the public relies on these drivers for one million trips a day citywide," said **Office of Inclusion Director Malcolm Cain**. "However, service refusals continue to be a persistent problem and the City needs your help in reporting illegal refusals, so we can end this problem together."

"New Yorkers and visitors with disabilities are entitled to equivalent access in everything the City has to offer, including taxis and for-hire vehicles," said **Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities (MOPD) Commissioner Victor Calise**. "MOPD commends the TLC on the agency's new public awareness campaign regarding illegal service refusals and we look forward to our continued partnership to increase accessibility in the taxi and for-hire vehicle fleets. Together, we will ensure that all TLC-licensed drivers are properly trained on disability etiquette, wheelchair securement, and the requirement that they must not refuse passengers based on their disability."

"We must do everything we can to stop taxis and for-hire vehicles from denying rides to passengers because of their race or destination within the five boroughs. It's illegal and outrageous but unfortunately we know it happens. That's why this ad campaign is so important – to put these drivers on alert and remind New Yorkers of their rights. I'm proud that we created a new Office of Inclusion within the NYC Taxi and Limousine Commission, an idea spearheaded by Council Member Donovan Richards, to address this ongoing issue," said **City Council Speaker Corey Johnson**.



"It's important for Black and Brown communities to have equal access to alternative modes of transportation, especially in transportation deserts throughout Queens," said **Council Member Donovan Richards**, District 31.

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"Refusing passengers is an inequality in mobility and acts as a barrier to employment, education, training and healthcare. Social inclusion is at the core of our efforts to improve the benefits that come with traveling within the borough. The color of your skin should not determine if you get to your destination or not."

"Every New Yorker deserves equal access to transportation, and no one should experience discrimination as they travel around our city," said **Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney (D-NY)**. "I commend TLC for educating New Yorkers on their transportation rights and look forward to working with TLC to end bigotry in our city."

"No New Yorker should face discrimination or be deprived a transportation option based on their background," said **Rep. Nydia M. Velázquez (D-NY)**. "This valuable campaign will educate all of us about how we can strive for fairer treatment for all our city's residents."

"Everyone deserves equal access to transportation regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation or physical disability, however, discrimination persists," said **State Senator James Sanders, Jr.** "While most TLC drivers are professional and courteous, there are always a few bad apples. I applaud the TLC for taking an important stand in educating the public about the unfair treatment that may arise when attempting to utilize a TLC-licensed vehicle and encouraging victims to report these issues so they can be addressed and resolved."

"Many New Yorkers rely on car services and taxis to travel around the city," said **Assistant Speaker and Assemblymember Felix W. Ortiz**. "Too many drivers discriminate and refuse service to the riding public. We should not permit this to continue. I welcome a new public awareness campaign to educate the public about their right to service. Drivers provide a public service and they are regulated by the city. They have to play by the rules and get riders to their destinations."

"Every New Yorker – regardless of their race, gender identity, or disability – has a right to ride in a for-hire vehicle. A service refusal based on a person's identity is illegal and discriminatory, and does not align with our City's values of inclusion. I thank the TLC Office of Inclusion and the New York City Council for spearheading this public awareness campaign to inform New Yorkers of their rights," said **State Senator Alessandra Biaggi (D-Bronx/Westchester)**.

“Service refusals have long been an ugly part of the taxi experience,” said **Manhattan Borough President Gale A. Brewer**. “All New Yorkers have the right to get to where they need to go quickly and safely, and this ad

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campaign being launched by the Taxi and Limousine Commission will help inform passengers—and drivers—of their rights.”

“No one should be denied service by a TLC-licensed driver for simply being who they are, for the color of their skin or for wanting to get across town,” said **NYC Council Member Daniel Dromm** (D-Jackson Heights, Elmhurst). “As a Queens Council Member who has been denied a ride to my home borough, I applaud TLC for educating riders on their rights, and for informing drivers of their responsibilities.”

“Every day New Yorkers rely on taxis and ride sharing apps to get to their destination,” said **Council Member Vanessa L. Gibson**. “As one of the most culturally diverse cities in the world, we have to ensure that no one is refused service on the basis of their race, sex, gender, sexual orientation or disability. That is why I am proud that the administration is taking action to address this issue with this new ad campaign and I urge anyone that has faced discrimination to come forward and report it. I also want to thank the thousands of TLC- licensed drivers that do not discriminate on the basis of someone’s identity and that work tirelessly to bring New Yorkers to their destination.”

“In the city of New York, racism continues every time a taxi driver denies someone a ride due to the color of their skin,” said **Council Member Antonio Reynoso**. “Not only is it unconscionable to deny someone service because of their identity, it is also illegal. The New York City Taxi and Limousine Commission’s new ad campaign will inform New Yorkers how to report incidents of illegal service refusals, a necessary first step in ensuring all New Yorkers can get to their destination without experiencing discrimination.”

Said NAACP NY State President Dr. Hazel N. Dukes, “Having been a victim myself of this form of discrimination, I have great expectations for the TLC’s new Office of Inclusion. The ads in their anti-refusal campaign are appropriately direct and powerful in their messaging, and I look forward to continuing to work with this administration and the Office of Inclusion to achieve the equity of taxi and for-hire vehicle service that we deserve and demand.”

“One of the most impressive elements of TLC’s campaign to end discriminatory ride refusals is that it provides an easy reporting method—calling 311—to assist commuters in collectively identifying the extent, location, and perpetrators of New York’s pervasive ride discrimination,” **Katurah Topps, Policy Counsel at the NAACP Legal Defense Fund (LDF)**, noted. “For too long, New York’s Black and Brown residents have borne the burden of knowing that, due to racism and stereotypes, the simple act of trying to hail a taxi is frequently uncertain. By reporting discriminatory driver conduct to TLC,



communities can put drivers on alert that no longer will we accept discriminatory ride refusals and cancellations as the status quo.”

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“The insidious discrimination that Black and Brown commuters in New Yorkers face when trying to get from one point to another has persisted for too long and must stop now. Allowing drivers, licensed by the City of New York, to deny a segment of the community equal access to ride services based on their race and destination is not only an attack on the dignity of every denied rider, but is also illegal,” said **Janai Nelson, Associate Director-Counsel at LDF**. “TLC’s campaign empowers all New Yorkers to push back against this unseemly practice that sullies our city.”

“NYC now has more accessible taxi and TNC service than any city in the US,” said **James Weisman, the President & Ceo of the United Spinal Association**. “United Spinal Association’s wheelchair using members applaud the TLC’s efforts to include all NYers in all modes of transportation the agency regulates and protect them from discrimination. Illegal service refusals based on disabled status or race must be eliminated.

“If you’re denied rides, you’re also denied rights – your civil rights,” said **Joe Rappaport**, executive director of the Brooklyn Center for Independence of the Disabled. “The TLC campaign will put everyone on notice that those rights must be protected and guaranteed.”

"The Taxis For All Campaign sued so wheelchair users could take advantage of the city’s vast taxi network, but discrimination toward wheelchair users, blind people and others persists," said **Edith Prentiss, chair of the Taxis For All Campaign**. "Now the word is out: discriminate and face the consequences."

“The best part of being a taxi driver in New York City is traveling to so many diverse communities, picking up everyone and taking them where they need to go. Whether you want to go to upper Manhattan, Bronx, Queens, or Staten Island, we are ready to take you. This campaign shares that powerful message, and reminds passengers how important their rights are,” said **Nancy Soria, a green taxi advocate and driver**.

"Access to safe, reliable transportation is especially important to people who are vulnerable to hate based violence - LGBTQ people, women and femmes, Black people, trans people, and people of color," said **Wendy Stark, Executive Director, Callen-Lorde Community Health Center**. "Access to transportation is also correlated to access to stable employment, which creates economic opportunities that enable folks who are vulnerable

to violence to take safer means of transportation when necessary. We applaud the TLC's Office of Inclusion for taking this step forward to ensure

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that our communities are treated fairly when traveling in taxis and other ride share services."

"I applaud the NYC Taxi and Limousine Commission Office of Inclusion's campaign to end illegal service refusals. This discriminatory practice has gone on for far too long, fueled by negative stereotypes of everyday citizens who are just trying to get from point A to point B. The data on illegal refusals is proof that New York City has a problem. It is my hope that this campaign will lead the way in solving it," said **Carmen Neely President, Harlem Pride - Co-Chair, Black and Latino LGBTQ Coalition.**

"NYC is a home for many. It's also a place to which many travel to make a life for themselves, often escaping violence, persecution, or just simply to live their true selves - free from fear or shame. Where they came from, they may have been embarrassed for just being - whether for the color of their skin or their sexual orientation/gender identity, which often leading to destabilized mental health," said **Manuel Rivera, co-chairperson of the NYC Black & Latino LGBTQ Coalition.** "When a person of color who is a member of LGBTQ+ communities is denied service in any way, especially by a taxi driver, that person can be made to feel diminished, as though they don't matter. NYC taxi drivers are also an important part of the city's fabric, and yet some wrongly hold onto tired stereotypes based in racism and homophobia/transphobia. This campaign is a powerful tool to help us see an end to this."

About the NYC TLC

Created in 1971, the TLC licenses and regulates taxicabs, for-hire vehicles, commuter vans, and paratransit vehicles. Its board consists of nine members, including eight unsalaried Commissioners. The Chair/Commissioner presides over regular public commission meetings and heads the agency, which has a staff of about 600 employees. TLC-licensed drivers complete over 1,000,000 trips a day. To drive professionally in New York City, licensees undergo a rigorous background check, must have a safe driving record, and complete 24 hours of driver education. TLC-licensed vehicles are inspected for safety and emission standards at the agency's Woodside Inspection Facility.

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