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ITAXIWORKERS ASSOCIATION STATEMENT ON MANDATORY PROTECTIVE SHIELDS IN TAXICABS

Toronto's taxi drivers strive to provide professional, courteous and safe service to the public on a daily basis. At times, providing this essential public service puts taxi drivers in harm's way. In fact, Statistics Canada confirms taxi driving is one of the most dangerous jobs in society. There are many contributing factors to the rate of robbery and assault facing taxi workers. It is essential the drivers affected by these very high risk conditions have a real voice in the way these issues are addressed.

With over 10,000 licensed taxi drivers in Toronto, there are a variety of opinions and a diversity of ideas on how to address taxi workers health and safety issues. In a survey conducted with over 300 Toronto taxi drivers, the iTaxiworkers Association reports 78% of respondents placed health and safety as their top concern. But in a complex industry vulnerable taxi workers have a diversity of opinion on how safety issues should be addressed. Rather than forcing all drivers to purchase expensive safety shields drivers say they want the option only if they feel it is right for their individual taxicab. Currently, City practice provides taxi drivers, garages, fleet owners and other industry stakeholders with the option to install safety shields in taxicabs. Some of the concerns raised by drivers in opposition to the installation of a safety shield are that it can limit the mobility of the driver's seat, creates a more confining space in the taxicab, and can depersonalize interactions with customers and the public.

The iTaxiworkers also recommends that the City of Toronto and the Municipal Licensing and Standards Division take a more comprehensive look at a wider range of health and safety issues and potential solutions, including, but not limited to:

1. Establish a permanent health and safety task force with MLS, frontline taxi drivers, police and health care professionals
2. Permit taxi drivers to request a pre-payment or deposit prior to taking a fare
3. Increase police services resources to address taxi specific incidents especially as they relate to reporting and investigations
4. City Council request that the Federal government immediately consider strengthening penalties for assaults on taxi drivers
5. City Council request that the Provincial government enact section 71. (1) of the Occupational Health and Safety Act Regulations (taxi industry) related to violence and harassment on the job
6. Establish a health and benefit fund so that all frontline drivers can have access to quality, comprehensive health care services

Overall, ensuring the safety and health of Toronto's taxi drivers is a complex challenge and any solution must be comprehensive and flexible so that frontline taxicab drivers have a choice in how to best serve the public in the safest way possible.

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