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Dear Mr. Green,

I write in the wake of deeply disturbing reports of sexual assault and harassment that have occurred through the Lyft app. In the past two months alone, Lyft has been sued by more than 30 passengers who allege that they were raped by drivers who should have been removed from the app long ago.¹

I draw your attention to one incident of particular concern to me as it symbolizes many of the breakdowns in Lyft's prevention and response to such incidents. News reports indicate that a woman named Alison Turkos was kidnapped and brutally assaulted at gunpoint by her Lyft driver and several other men in 2017. She was allegedly driven to an isolated park before being dropped off at her apartment in the middle of the night, and didn't realize what happened until she saw a charge of \$106.80 on her Lyft app the next morning and noticed that she was experiencing pain throughout her body and severe vaginal bleeding. When she tried to inform Lyft of this horrific incident, she received a series of automated responses, culminating in a promise to "unpair" her from the driver who attacked her and a partial reimbursement for the cost of the ride, leaving her with a charge of \$12.81. The driver who raped her remained on the app for some time following her report, and while his account has since been permanently deactivated, Lyft has not indicated when it did so.²

Victims of sexual assault by your drivers also report difficulties communicating with representatives of your company due to both the "labyrinthine" complaint procedures and an inadequate response to complaints.³ Even worse, when passengers are finally able to submit their complaint, they have even been blamed for the harassment they experienced. One young woman who was coerced by her driver into giving him her phone number reported this behavior to Lyft. When she did, Lyft responded that because she had given him her number, this "limits the consequences on the driver." Others have reported that Lyft has treated instances of harassment as "sour personal interaction[s]," agreeing to no longer pair a particular passenger with that driver but failing to discipline or even confront the harassing driver. You have stated that you

¹ Lauren Kaori Gurley, *Lyft Allegedly Kept a Driver on the Platform Who Held a Passenger at Gunpoint While Two Other Men Raped Her*, Vice, Sept. 17, 2019, available at https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/vb57w8/lyft-allegedly-kept-a-driver-on-the-platform-who-held-a-passenger-at-gunpoint-while-two-other-men-raped-her?utm_source=vicetwitterus.

² Sarah Ashley O'Brien, *Lyft Hit by Five More Alleged Sexual Assault, Rape Cases in One Day*, CNN, Sept. 18, 2019, available at <https://www.cnn.com/2019/09/17/tech/lyft-hit-by-five-more-sexual-assault-cases/index.html>.

³ Lauren Kaori Gurley, *Lyft Has Been Flooded With Sexual Assault Lawsuits*, Vice, Aug. 21, 2019, available at https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/vb5ed8/lyft-has-been-flooded-with-sexual-assault-lawsuits.

“do not tolerate harassment or violence” on your platform, but that is difficult to believe if you are not taking reports of harassment and violence seriously, as these reports suggest.⁴

Last year, following a CNN report that found that at least 103 Uber drivers and 18 Lyft drivers faced sexual assault allegations in the United States, you agreed to stop forcing sexual assault victims to pursue their claims through arbitration and sign non-disclosure agreements.⁵ I commend you on this important policy change, but it is clearly not enough. At that time, you also agreed to publish safety transparency reports that would indicate how many assaults occur on your platforms, but you have not yet done so.

You have also implemented daily criminal background searches, a step that I understand has led to 20,000 drivers being removed from your competitor, Uber, and an unknown number from Lyft. But you aggressively resisted utilizing fingerprint-based background checks, which is required of most taxi drivers.⁶ Your opposition to this routine form of background check was so intense that you shut down operations in Austin, Texas when a local law required fingerprint-based background checks.

I understand that Lyft has recently instituted new safety features, including a “panic button” that allows travelers to call 911 immediately from within the app. I have also learned that Lyft has partnered with the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN) to develop mandatory safety trainings for driver applicants. These are important first steps and I am hopeful that these initiatives are the beginning of a new trend at Lyft. But I also hope that it does not take another rash of lawsuits and media investigations for you to take affirmative steps to ensure rider safety.

In 2016, Lyft advertised that it was working with *It's On Us*, an anti-sexual assault initiative led by the White House, to give college students free rides “so they don’t need to worry about finding a safe ride home after going out.”⁷ If you are marketing your company as providing safe rides for young, intoxicated women specifically as a way to avoid sexual assault, then it is especially crucial that you ensure that these rides are in fact safe. Otherwise, these advertisements serve as a signal to sexual predators that driving for Lyft is an effective way to prey on vulnerable women.

To better understand the steps that Lyft has taken and needs to take, please provide a written response to the following questions by no later than October 31, 2019:

1. Please explain Lyft’s process for dealing with a report of sexual assault or harassment. Do you report the incident to law enforcement? Do you suspend drivers while you

⁴ Faiz Siddiqui, *How Lyft Lost the Trust of #DeleteUber Women Who Thought it Was ‘Woke’*, Washington Post, Aug. 2, 2019, available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2019/08/02/how-lyft-lost-trust-deleteuber-women-who-thought-it-was-woke/?arc404=true>.

⁵ Sarah Ashley O’Brien, *Amid Sexual Assault Concerns, Lyft Tries to Reassure Riders With Safety Measures*, CNN, Sept. 10, 2019, available at <https://www.cnn.com/2019/09/10/tech/lyft-safety-updates/index.html>.

⁶ Justin Pritchard, *Uber Settles Driver Background-Check Case for At Least \$10M*, AP News, April 7, 2016, available at <https://apnews.com/d5bcac26827d448b96c9b898d5c62b17>.

⁷ *Get Home Safely with Lyft*, Lyft Blog, Nov. 2, 2016, available at <https://blog.lyft.com/posts/get-home-safely-with-lyft>.

investigate these reports? What is the standard for banning a driver from your service? Will you commit to making the details of these procedures available to the public through your app?

2. How many Lyft drivers have been removed from the app since you instituted daily background checks this April? When precisely did you deactivate the account of the driver who assaulted Ms. Turkos?
3. Will you commit to conducting fingerprint-based, as opposed to name-based, background checks?
4. What steps do you take to ensure that drivers who assault or harass riders are permanently prohibited from driving for Lyft? Do you work together with Uber and other ride-hailing apps to ensure that a driver removed from one app cannot just then switch to the other?
5. Do you employ customer service representatives who are trained sexual assault victim advocates? What training do employees receive on identifying sexual harassment and assault? What training do they receive on responding to these reports using a victim-centered approach?
6. Will you commit to ensuring that reports of sexual assault or harassment are immediately handled by human reviewers specifically empowered and trained to address these issues?
7. Will you commit to suspending marketing campaigns representing your app as ensuring a "safe ride home" until you publicly release statistics on the number of assaults and incidents of harassment reported against your drivers?
8. What steps are you taking to ensure that victims are informed of whether the drivers they report for such behaviors still work with your companies?

Should you have any questions, please contact Charlotte Schwartz at Charlotte_Schwartz@blumenthal.senate.gov and Aparna Patrie at Aparna_Patrie@judiciary-dem.senate.gov.

Sincerely,



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator