

Miss Helen Ntentis



Economy and Infrastructure Committee
Parliament of Victoria

Dear Economy and Infrastructure Committee:

Thank you for allowing me to be able to submit my personal story about how the reforms to the taxi industry have impacted me but firstly let me tell you about how I got my taxi licence.

My parents came to this country in the mid-50s, worked hard in various industries, my dad first worked in the smelters for the railways, mum as a seamstress sewing seats in the production line at Toyota. My dad was a very proud man, he had to raise his siblings after their father had passed away; my dad was only 10 years old but he had 5 siblings younger than him, the youngest being 3 months old so he was now the man of the household. I am only telling you this information for you to understand my dad's character and how proud of him my brother and I are of his achievements here in his adopted country compared to where he came from.

My dad always wanted to work for himself and this value he instilled in us. With my mum they decided to buy a taxi licence. By the mid-80s, my dad had 3 taxi licences and decided to have a go with a hire car licence. In his mid-60s my dad decided to go alone and start his own hire car business. Any other person would have thrown in the towel and decide to retire, but that was not in my dad's vocabulary. My dad's motto was "don't let any bastard wear you down". I hope you are getting a picture of my dad's character. Proud, determined, pioneering (he was the first of his family to come to Australia) and adventurous.

My dad passed away March 2009 thinking he had left his wife and children a legacy; his small business of taxi licences and hire car licence. My mum passed away in February 2013. There were complications with the estate and I finally had a taxi licence in my name in 2016. In the three years of the estate being worked out we saw the income from the taxi licence plummet. Before my mum's passing she was receiving rent of \$2800 for one taxi licence and \$500 rent for the hire car licence; self-funded retirees, did not need the aged pension, paid for private health insurance and never received a discount of any of their services, be it energy or vehicle registrations.

When I started to receive rent for the taxi licence my first payment was for \$1990, still a modest income. Yet every month the rent would decrease, the reason I was given was that you can lease a

Economy and Infrastructure Committee

24/06/2019

Page 2

licence from the government for \$23,000 and Uber operating and gaining market share. My final payment in September 2017 was \$1400, in a year my income decreased by \$500 a month.

When my mum had her stroke in 2012, I left work to look after her. We did not qualify for the carers' pension as my mum had assets, her licences.

So now I have no employment, a mortgage, no income and all this stress has led to mental health issues, depression and anxiety and my health suffering due to early onset of diabetes of which I am now insulin dependent. This is how the reforms by the Andrews' Government have impacted me.

I tried to start my own taxi company to continue my dad's legacy and his advice to "work for yourself, build on what I have left you." I designed a logo and I was all set to go yet trying to deal with the Taxi Services Commission after the reforms was difficult to say the least. Ms Allan kept saying in the news that we now had a level playing field, yet we did not as I discovered. If I wanted to be a taxi, I still had to charge what was on the Taxi Commissions' website, still had to have a camera in the car (which proved difficult to obtain if you did not join one of the networks), had to have a complaints processing system that gave out a reference number (yet I complained to black cabs 5 times and never received a reference number or even a callback), and because I wanted to have an all-female driver taxi service I had to get an exemption from the Human Rights Commission and engage a solicitor yet all Uber did was have a app and entered the market. How is this a level playing field?

I was employed up to March of this year and have struggled to gain employment, with most jobs I apply for being another 299 applying for the same role. I am not eligible to receive any welfare payments as I have some small investments in the stock market which provide me with \$500 a week. I've had to let go of my private health insurance as I can longer afford it.

I am currently unemployed looking for work daily; writing cover letters, sending out applications and resumes, it is causing me more health problems. If I still had the taxi income or the true value of the licence at least there would be one stress I would not have to worry about, losing my home which a very real possibility if I do not get a job by the end of July.

My parent's instilled a great work ethic in both my brother and I, we have never taken a welfare payment, we have been gainfully employed most of our lives and we believed in a fair go to all Australians, that give it a go, unfortunately what these reforms have done is shown this is far from the truth!

Thank you for reading my story. If you need to contact me for clarification on anything my contact number is [REDACTED].

Economy and Infrastructure Committee

24/06/2019

Page 3

Sincerely,

Miss Helen Ntentis