

The Secretary
Legislative Council
Economy and Infrastructure Committee
Parliament House Spring St
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

INQUIRY INTO THE COMMERCIAL PASSENGER VEHICLE INDUSTRY ACT 2017 REFORMS
CONFIDENTIAL – PLEASE MAKE MY STORY PUBLIC WITHOUT MY NAME PLEASE

It is with great gratitude I write this letter to share my experience of the effects the arrival of Uber and the subsequent legislation had on my family business, and life. I sincerely hope this submission along with the many others received paints a clearer picture of the hardship endured resulting from Government decision making.

We purchased our first taxi licence in the late 1970s, at the time a taxi licence cost as much as a home, I worked as a nurse's assistant and undertook the administration of our business while my husband ran and operated the taxi. During this time, I also I obtained a taxi drivers licence which I was very proud of.

It was through sheer hard work and determination and over the course of many years we purchased other licences. I eventually stopped working as a nurse's assistant to support the business. Suffice to say, we were committed to the industry, our drivers and customers by often working in excess of 15 hours per day.

My sons joined us in their late teens, and the business become a success family business which provided for us and both of my son's families. We repaired and maintained taxis, some of our drivers had been with us for over fifteen years, so our business felt more like a community. Like us, many drivers were migrants, we provided employment and guidance to these young men like others had done for us.

So, you can imagine the devastation the erosion of the industry has caused our family. In hindsight the beginning was marked by Professor Fels who sought to "reform" the industry. At the time we didn't comprehend what this would mean for us all.

Once the 'Fels' reforms were adopted by the then Napthine Government in 2013/2014 the driver knowledge test was introduced and resulted in our drivers who held licences for five years or less being required to retake their taxi licence exam. They all failed, our friends and other drivers all shared the same experience and it was rare to hear of someone passing the test. The difficulty of infamous taxi test was well published by the ABC (<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-08-19/no-new-drivers-pass-victoria-taxi-knowledge-test/5680868>) which confirmed:

"Of the 234 people to sit the exam, driver trainer Karen Downie was the only person to pass".

For 3 years while Uber operated illegally, we suffered from a 30% reduction in income and driver shortages left many of our vehicles sitting idle. The drivers who didn't pass the test confirmed they would become Uber drivers as there weren't any requirements to undertake exams, special insurances, fees, licences or costs. Effectively, anyone could be an Uber driver. Our income was slashed during this period, in large part by the unfair playing between the taxi industry and unregulated and illegal Uber.

During this tough time things got harder with the introduction of further reforms in commercial passenger vehicles and Uber accelerating a powerful presence in the industry. In 2016 we were notified the Andrew's Government would be revoking our perpetual licences. We had the option to continue to run taxis however going forward we would be required to purchase annual permits from the Government.

The business and assets we developed over decades of hard work and sacrificing was stripped from us by legislation and "reforms". Our business had become financially unviable and my sons who were in their mid-forties had to find new jobs and restart their careers, from business owners they became salary owners.

Our taxis were our livelihood, passion and our future investment which we built over a lifetime. They provided us with security in retirement and provided an opportunity for our children. The approach taken by successive State Governments left us powerless.

Adding further insult to injury, the Andrew's Government promised to compensate owners by offering one-hundred-thousand dollars for the first taxi licence and fifty-thousand dollars for the second, third and fourth. We had ten licences and we'd only be compensated partially for four. Once again, I was shocked, how could a Government limit compensation to four licences and pay variable sums? This went against the Australian notion of fairness.

In all honesty, what broke my heart was knowing the taxi licenses would no longer be ours. The financial cost of the Government's actions has caused enormous anxiety and great uncertainty for our future and our children's future. The family business no longer exists, my husband and I have been forced into retirement and I can't help but regret leaving my children while I worked in the business for assets that no longer exist. I wish for nothing more than to have our yellow taxis and see my children and grandchildren benefit from our hard work and sacrifice.

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