



UTWSD Press Kit



I. President's Welcome

Welcome to the United Taxi Workers of San Diego (UTWSD) press kit. I encourage you to look around our website, <http://www.utwsd.org>, and explore the many aspects of the UTWSD, including where we've come from and where we are hoping to go.

After the driver strikes of December 2009, a core group of leaders formed UTWSD in order to build on the momentum of bringing drivers together to fight for a more equitable taxi industry. For the past two years, we have also been fighting for an equal amount of driver representatives on San Diego's Taxi Advisory Committee and on July 14th in an 8 to 2 vote, we achieved this goal. We are currently on the verge of campaigns to establish the foundation of our organization.

We have several priorities leading up to the driver election:

- Protecting drivers who stand up from retaliation, harassment, and firing;
- Communicating with drivers and potential driver representatives on the safety protection needs and rights of drivers;
- Educating elected officials on the needs of the drivers;
- Monitoring the criteria for eligibility to ensure fair opportunity for those who want to represent drivers and for those who want to vote.

We are very proud of all the accomplishments we have achieved and have the hard work of our driver members and allies to thank for it. We invite you all to join us on our journey to ensure that all taxi drivers are treated with dignity and respect.

In Solidarity,

Mikaiil Hussein,
President of United Taxi Workers of San Diego

Phone: (619)713-5404 Fax: (619)713-5374



II. Brief History of Organization

United Taxi Workers of San Diego (UTWSD) arose out of a dire need to protect labor and health rights of working immigrants in the San Diego taxi industry. UTWSD was formed in January 2010 immediately following the taxi drivers' strike of December 2009. High lease prices and gas rates, lack of health insurance, racial harassment by public transportation officials and police authorities, and overall a poorly regulated taxi industry necessitated better self-representation, better health and safety education, and better knowledge among immigrant drivers. UTWSD is an association of taxi workers in San Diego, California.

III. Our Mission

The mission of United Taxi Workers of San Diego (UTWSD) is to unify San Diego taxicab workers and to improve the taxicab working conditions and services provided through advocacy, training and self-empowerment.

IV. Our Vision

We envision a driver-led taxi association that provides professional, efficient and safe services for residents and visitors that meets the comprehensive and diverse needs of taxi drivers. We also envision a taxi industry environment free from humiliation, intimidation, discrimination, and exploitation that will improve the transportation services of San Diego.

V. Membership

UTWSD membership is comprised of over 600 diverse taxi drivers who work and live throughout urban and metro San Diego, with the majority residing in city council District 4 (approximately 57%), District 3, and District 7. Our members represent, *inter alia*, the United States of America, Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, Turkey, Ethiopia, Kenya, Iraq, Georgia, Nigeria, Sudan, Vietnam, Egypt, Eritrea, Somalia, Morocco, Mexico, Congo, and Russia.

VI. Current Social Injustices of the “Driving Poor”

On February 12, 2011, the cab accident at Stingaree reminded the public of the health dangers to the San Diego community as a whole of an overworked, unprotected worker. The horrific and senseless murder of taxi driver, Mir Sadat Sahou, on September 29, 2011, once again emphasizes the urgent need of taxi safety protections for both the driver and public as a whole.

San Diego cabdrivers personify the search for the “American Dream”, predominantly as immigrants from Ethiopia, Iraq, Mexico, Somalia, and many other nations across the globe. Few passengers realize that these laborers work for 12-hour shifts per day, pay as much as \$865 lease fees per week, lack health insurance and with increasing gas prices may earn less



than \$5 per day. Retaliation from permit holders remains a persisting reality that silences many lease drivers from expressing concerns about dangerous working conditions and safety violations.

Taxi drivers are termed “independent contractors” under California law, which has permitted the exploitation of immigrant workers because drivers are not protected by state or federal traditional employment laws, lack financial resources to defend injustices, and unwittingly sign away their rights in mandatory binding arbitration agreements. Drivers do not benefit from labor laws of mandatory lunch periods, breaks, minimum wage and limited shifts. In addition, accident insurance covers the car, not the driver. Because of high likelihood of accidents and solo nature of the work, drivers are among the most at-risk for life-threatening injuries and death.

VII. Current Campaigns

Driver Elections:

After over a year of UTWSD attending city meetings and lobbying to protect drivers rights, on July 14th of 2011 the MTS Board voted 8 to 2 to equalize the cities Taxi Advisory Committee (TAC) by voting to add five driver representatives on the board.

Timeline:

Friday, September 23, 2011: Election Guidelines Announcement

Tuesday-Thursday, October 18-20, 2011: Lease driver self-nomination at 1501 National Ave. (Forms filled out on site)

Tuesday, October 25, 2011: Drivers are validated

Friday, November 4, 2011: Candidate Names Announced

Tuesday-Thursday, November 15-17, 2011: Elections at 1501 National Ave.

Friday-Tuesday, November 18-29, 2011: Votes Counted

Wednesday, December 14, 2011: New members notified by mail

UTWSD Health-Related and Safety Initiatives

UTWSD places special emphasis on health education and safety knowledge of taxicab drivers to improve the San Diego taxicab industry through advanced, culturally and linguistically appropriate training. The primary work of UTWSD consists of the following categories: 1) Advocacy and Organizing, 2) Education and Training, 3) Professional Services, and 4) Taxi Industry Reform. Our ongoing surveys with taxi drivers accurately document root causes of current industry concerns. Trainings emphasize health-related topics: traffic laws to enhance public safety, industry rules/regulation, preventative disease, local health clinics, healthy living, and overall safe driving. With our trainings, we strive to create an organizing base with the purpose of ensuring public safety and rights of drivers in San Diego.

Phone: (619)713-5404 Fax: (619)713-5374



Ordinance 11 Reform

Ordinance 11 regulates the taxi industry on issues such as driver dress code, trip logs, taxi meters, etc. However, it fails to regulate the lease prices and the number of hours taxi drivers can work. Some taxi drivers pay up to \$865 every week to lease the taxis they drive - many drivers end up working as much as 10-20 hours per day, for 7 days a week just to cover the cost of their leases. At the end of the day, they may have operated at a loss.

Every day, taxi drivers receive police and Metropolitan Transit System (MTS) tickets for minor rule infractions such as missing road maps, or standing 12 feet away from their vehicle, or neglecting to wear a name badge under current Ordinance 11 rules. Meanwhile, they are silenced from identifying safety concerns out of fear of retaliation and blacklisting from the industry. There is no formal grievance process for safety violations or whistle blowing claims.

Without proper reform, the City of San Diego ends up protecting property while failing to protect lives. Drivers suffer long, 60 to 70-hour work weeks and are vulnerable to injury from assaults and accidents at a higher rate than any workforce. Similarly, the safety of the both the driver and the public is at risk when a driver has to work extremely long hours just to cover the cost of his lease, ends up not taking sufficient rest breaks because he is concerned about covering his costs, and inevitably ends up harming the public. Reform is necessary to protect human lives.

VIII. Victories

UTWSD has promoted democratic, decentralized and participatory leadership in both its organizational culture and within the taxi industry by successfully lobbying equal 5 owner – 5 driver representation on the taxi advisory board, which previously included 9 owners, 1 owner as a nonprofit member, members of the tourist industry, and a driver selected by the owners.

Since our founding in 2009, we have worked to secure many accomplishments thanks to the efforts of our driver members and allies. We have identified low-interest credit card wireless machines, employment identification numbers, and reduced arbitrary confiscations of Sheriff's Licenses for drivers. We have outreached hundreds of San Diego taxi drivers about protecting their rights, assisted drivers with their claims and grievances, improved communication with San Diego's Metropolitan Transit System (MTS), obtained legal representation for taxi drivers with the Employee Rights Center. We have received over 5000 in-kind professional services from local organizations and have earned support from elected city officials.

IX. Contact

United Taxi Workers of San Diego

7364 El Cajon Blvd., Suite 108

San Diego, CA 92115

P: (619) 713-5404 F: (619) 713-5374

<http://utwsd.org>

Media Inquiries: media@utwsd.org

Phone: (619)713-5404 Fax: (619)713-5374