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Thousands of Uber, Lyft drivers fail new background checks



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The state said 8,206 drivers out of 70,789 were rejected for infractions ranging from violent crimes and sexual offenses to suspended licenses.

By Adam Vaccaro | GLOBE STAFF APRIL 05, 2017

More than 8,000 drivers for ride-hailing companies including Uber and Lyft have been denied licenses to operate in Massachusetts under a new state background check process.

The most common reason for rejections were related to driver's license status: many had suspended licenses or had not been driving long enough to qualify for the ride-hailing services.

But statistics released by the Massachusetts Department of Public Utilities revealed that hundreds of drivers were rejected for having serious crimes on their record, including violent or sexual offenses, and others for driving-related offenses, such as drunk driving or reckless driving. The state said it rejected 51 applications coming from sex offenders.

Applicants who were rejected by the state cannot get a license to drive for a ride-hailing operation.

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“Under Massachusetts law, Lyft’s commercial background check provider, like all consumer reporting agencies, is legally prevented from looking back further than seven years into driver applicants’ histories,” Lyft said in a statement. “The state does not face the same limitation, which likely explains why a small percentage of our drivers failed the state’s background check while passing ours.”

Uber reacted angrily to the state’s results, saying the unlimited reach of the government’s background checks is unfair to drivers who are trying to overcome past troubles.

“Thousands of people in Massachusetts have lost access to economic opportunities as a result of a screening that includes an unfair and unjust indefinite lookback period. We have an opportunity to repair the current system in the rules process so that people who deserve to work are not denied the opportunity.”

Meanwhile, Governor Charlie Baker said in a statement that, “Massachusetts has set a national standard for driver safety and we look forward to future partnerships with Uber, Lyft and others to grow this innovative industry and support more jobs and economic opportunities for all.”

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Adam Vaccaro can be reached at adam.vaccaro@globe.com. Follow him on Twitter at [@adamtvaccaro](https://twitter.com/adamtvaccaro).

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