

June 12, 2013

Lemoore City Council
119 Fox Street
Lemoore, Ca 93245

Members of the City Council,

I am writing to discuss the designated driver situation within the city of Lemoore and taxi services within Lemoore and Hanford. It has come to the council's attention that there seems to be a high number of designated drivers within the area and that it is taking from taxi businesses. A community member who goes by the name of Taxi Steve is extremely concerned about the amount of people that choose to use designated drivers, or use a sober driver to get to or leave bars within Lemoore and sometimes Hanford and he would like a definition to be able to try to gain more business and to try to make taxi services the only available service that the community can use not only for coming from bars but for general transportation. The focus of this letter will be on designated driving though the topic of general transportation will be talked about as the topic comes up.

Soon after automobiles became more mainstream, so did alcohol related car accidents. The first state in the US to have laws against driving under the influence was New York in 1910 with California following soon after. Driving under the influence can kill almost 30 people in the US per day, that's 1 death every 48 minutes. With these numbers one can see that trying to deter drunk driving is a very important action. Each death affects family, friends and the community at large that the person who died interacted with everyday.

Through personal experience I can attest that the Lemoore Police Department are doing everything that they can to deter driving while under the influence. I have seen the fast action of the department responding to fights, DUIs and watching during peak times to make sure that drivers get home safe. The Police Department does not need false reports due to community members taking alternative means of transportation, this action takes away from incidents that need more focus. The department has been following rules and regulations that have been put into place long before taxi services have been within this area. Though, the police department is not the only means to deter drunk driving.

Most laws were enhanced in the late 1970s with regulations, awareness and new means to deter drunk driving being established in the late 1980s throughout the 1990s. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics the rates of intoxication in fatal accidents has declined across every age group. "In 1986, there was about 1 driver involved in a fatal accident in which he/she was intoxicated for every 10,500 drivers; in 1996, the rate translates into about 1 intoxicated driver in a fatal accident for every 17,200 licensed drivers." The decrease is most likely due to programs being put into place. Programs such as designated drivers have been around since the 1920s but within the United States the concept is pretty new, becoming a large scale operation in the late 1980s, giving the program around a 25 year run. We can see that when the designated driving program started that the amount of fatalities due to driving under the influence had also decreased.

The definition of what a designated driver is vague at the most, the idea starts that before a group goes out they designate a person who does not drink and drives everyone around and keep them from driving while under the influence. This program has been put into place on the Lemoore Naval Base as well as maintained for civilians through media and law enforcement. Through statistics, it has shown that the amount of fatalities has gone down since the inception of the program. Taking away this program or putting limits due to perceived sabotage can increase the fatalities within the area. A definition of designated drivers may help, though it does not define nor help those that are stranded, have no money for taxis, need to be someplace at a certain time, or do not trust the taxi services within the area and call on friends to help them in times of need.

Alternative means, including taxis to driving drunk all help decreasing the amounts of fatalities due

to driving while under the influence. Reliable friends, taxis, taking keys away, media on not driving drunk, more night public transportation, etc. can all help keep drunk drivers off the street and people alive.

While a definition of what a designated driver may alleviate the idea of the issue at hand, the bigger problem is that the taxi services in Lemoore and Hanford are feeling a large hit to their business because of an upswing in the public using alternative means of transportation other than taxis. This may be due to the lack of customer service, pricing issues and untimely taxis. From personal experience, I know that this to be true. I had once waited two hours for a taxi after they told me it would be 15 minutes and I ended up driving to the bar then asking a taxi to follow me home to pick me up and bring me back to the bar. I have heard from friends over and over again that they have waited over 45 minutes for taxis when they have promised a 15 minute time frame. I have also heard of taxis over charging for rides, I have heard of taxis not accepting calls from customers that they do not like, I have heard of taxis dropping drunk people off at the wrong place and leaving them there, or just in the middle of no where. This has led many to look for alternative means of transportation and leaving the taxi services to be in a battle with their customers and trying at any cost to force customers to use their services.

I have been at the focus of one taxi service because I choose to be a responsible driver and to help friends of mine when in need of a ride, either to work or to bar or to hang out afterwards. The first incident that I became aware that I was being targeted was when Taxi Steve drove behind my parked vehicle in front of Micky's. I was in my car waiting on my three friends that were giving directions to some others, two of the friends got into the car because it was cold outside and we were waiting on the third. When I looked out to where this friend might be, she had vanished, I exited my car to find her, when Taxi Steve yelled from his vehicle that I cannot be an unlicensed taxi service, I told him I was not, he repeated it over again, and I repeated that I wasn't. He then said that I do not know the persons inside my vehicle, I told him I did know them and he repeated that I was a unlicensed taxi service. I repeated I was not, he continued with this until I finally told him to prove it if he thinks so. I then got back into my car where we continued to search via texting and calling. My friend finally got into the car, as I was about to leave I noticed Taxi Steve outside of my vehicle taking pictures. It was at this time that Micky's had customers coming out. I had yelled at Steve for taking pictures, continuing on the line that I am a designated driver, it is at this time he said that I was stealing clients away, I pointed out to him the customers leaving Micky's and said there are people waiting for a taxi there and that I was a designated driver. I then got into my car which was parked in front of Micky's to turn right onto D street. I was then that I noticed that Taxi Steve was right behind me I quickly parked and let him pass me because I knew he could not have clients within that amount of time and be right behind me. He pulled over to let me pass him I instead turned left onto a side street and then again back onto fox street where he was behind me. I pulled over near the train tracks where he parked in the middle of the road on Fox Street. He continued to claim that I was an unlicensed taxi service, I told him that I wasn't and that I did not want him to follow me. I told him that I would call the cops, he informed me that he already had, so I said I would wait for them. It was then that another car came behind him which forced him to move and allowed me to continue on my journey and take my friends home.

From this point on, he has followed me several times, he has admitted that prior to this incident that he had followed me for 2 months. He has called DUIs on me, one in which I didn't even drive my vehicle, constantly yelling at me for driving my friends and family around. He has given my license plate number to other taxi services and told them if they see me giving a ride to anyone to call the cops on me. These are things that he has done to me alone, not to mention that some women have told me that they feel sexually harassed when using his services, that he has hit someone with his car so he can follow another person around, kicking people out of his taxi, starting fights, over charging an extremely intoxicated person, he will go into bars to check on the alcohol level of patrons, he has charged for taxi rides even though he has been paid for the same ride. It is because of these actions that Taxi Steve has lost a large portion of his client base. Many military patrons will not use him, a large faction of regulars have stopped using him after being quiet loyal to him. His

actions have lead others to come out against him, this is a small town with a tight nit community. I have heard of my story being told back to me and how they will not use Taxi Steve because of his actions. If you calculate that for ever person he loses thats \$7 and at least a \$1-\$3 dollar tip, he could be loosing up to \$10 a ride. At first it was only about \$20 a night, but over time and over the amount of harassment he has lost more and more clients, upping his losses to over \$100 a night at least. It is no surprise why he is upset, but this could have been all stopped if he did not try to harass his customers.

As for other taxi services the main problems are things like overcharging, bad customer service and untimely pick ups. In the past I have heard of similar problems, like taxi drivers being intoxicated while driving, dropping people off at the wrong place or just anywhere. The bad customer service affects the taxi services in general but also the bar and restaurant services as well as going to any business. I have started to walk to more places within Lemoore because of the untimeliness of the taxi services, if I knew that when I called and the taxi service came when they said, I would have no problems calling them, but because of this and overcharging, myself and others do things like come home early so that my mother can use the car when she needs to in the morning, ask friends for rides, walk, use public transportation when available. Also, more people will simple not go out, especially when seasons like hot, foggy, or rainy days are in affect. This affects the community, its businesses and community activities on a whole.

Also, the unneeded calls on bars require ABC to create a file, the more transactions that happen, no matter how little the more chances that the bars will get their alcohol license revoked, which also means, less need for taxis if there is no place for the people of Lemoore to go to to unwind.

A definition may just alleviate the idea and keep and over all understanding what a designated driver does and can do. It does not help those times when friends are just giving rides to friends, or even hanging out. This goes into not only giving a ride to friends, but also ride sharing and other means of ways to keep the amount of cars on the road to a minimum and minimizing the environmental impact. It also questions what happens if someone sees a person in need of a ride, what I like to call a good samaritan act. I have been given rides from strangers within the community in the past, (not the best decision of my life) but in the heat of the valley it can be the better option. How does questioning designated drivers affected those that just want to help their fellow man? Is everyone who gives a ride to someone an "unlicensed" taxi service?

Solutions would be for taxi services to let their customers come back to them by upping their customer service and proving that they can provide for the community. Designated drivers and like programs that try to keep drunk drivers off the road should be kept and maintained, anything that deviates from this contributes to more deaths. The solutions should me more apparent, keep drunk drivers off the road, no matter what means. If taxi services back this idea, even help the community through free means of taxi services, they would gain more of their customers back. It is situations like this that makes me wonder why during peak times such as 4th of July, New Years etc. we do not have free transportations systems like larger cities do. I hope this can be remedied quickly, but I fear there is no real way to have a mutual understanding.

Sincerely,

Sarah Ormsby
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