

KRISTEN CLARKE, Assistant Attorney General  
REBECCA B. BOND, Chief  
KATHLEEN P. WOLFE, Special Litigation Counsel  
KEVIN J. KIJEWski, Deputy Chief  
CHERYL ROST, Trial Attorney (NJBN 020982011)  
MATTHEW FAIELLA, Trial Attorney (NYRN 4437711)  
SARAH GOLABEK-GOLDMAN, Trial Attorney (DCRN 1047833)  
U.S. Department of Justice  
950 Pennsylvania Ave., NW- 4CON  
Washington, DC 20530  
Telephone: (202) 616-5311  
Fax: (202) 307-1197  
cheryl.rost@usdoj.gov  
matthew.faiella@usdoj.gov  
sarah.golabek-goldman@usdoj.gov

STEPHANIE M. HINDS (CABN 154284)  
Acting United States Attorney  
MICHELLE LO (NYRN 4325163)  
Chief, Civil Division  
DAVID M. DEVITO (CABN 243695)  
Assistant United States Attorney  
450 Golden Gate Avenue  
San Francisco, California 94102-3495  
Telephone: (415) 436-7332  
Fax: (415) 436-6748  
david.devito@usdoj.gov  
Attorneys for United States of America

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

Plaintiff,

v.

UBER TECHNOLOGIES, INC.

Defendant.

CASE NO. 21-8735

**COMPLAINT**

DEMAND FOR JURY TRIAL

Plaintiff United States of America brings this action to enforce Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act (“ADA”), 42 U.S.C. §§ 12181-89, as amended, and its implementing regulation, 49 C.F.R. Part 37, against Defendant Uber Technologies, Inc. (“Defendant” or “Uber”). The ADA

1 prohibits discrimination based on disability by a private entity that is primarily engaged in the business  
2 of transporting people and whose operations affect commerce. 42 U.S.C. § 12184(a). The United States  
3 alleges as follows:

#### 4 **BACKGROUND**

5 1. Uber discriminates against passengers with disabilities and potential passengers with  
6 disabilities in violation of the ADA, 42 U.S.C. §§ 12181-89, and its implementing regulation, 49 C.F.R.  
7 Part 37, through its policies and practices of imposing “wait time” fees on passengers with disabilities  
8 who, because of disability, require more time than that allotted by Uber to board the vehicle.

9 2. In violation of the ADA, Uber has failed to (1) ensure adequate vehicle boarding time for  
10 passengers with disabilities; (2) ensure equitable fares for passengers with disabilities; and (3) make  
11 reasonable modifications to its policies and practices of imposing wait time fees as applied to passengers  
12 who, because of disability, require more time to board the vehicle. *See* 49 C.F.R. §§ 37.167(i), 37.29(c),  
13 and 37.5(d), (f); 42 U.S.C. § 12184(a), (b)(2)(A); *see also* 28 C.F.R. § 36.302 (incorporated by reference  
14 in 49 C.F.R. § 37.5(f)).

15 3. The Attorney General has commenced this action based on a determination that Uber has  
16 engaged in a pattern or practice of discrimination and a determination that a person or group of persons  
17 has been discriminated against, and that such discrimination raises an issue of general public  
18 importance. 42 U.S.C. § 12188(b)(1)(B). The United States seeks declaratory and injunctive relief,  
19 monetary damages, including compensatory and emotional distress damages, and a civil penalty against  
20 Uber.

21 4. Congress enacted the ADA in 1990 “to provide a clear and comprehensive national  
22 mandate for the elimination of discrimination against individuals with disabilities.” 42 U.S.C.  
23 § 12101(b)(1). In enacting the ADA, Congress found that discrimination against individuals with  
24 disabilities persists in transportation. *See* 42 U.S.C. § 12101(a)(3).

25 5. The ADA’s prohibition against discrimination in specified public transportation services  
26 provided by private entities, such as Uber, is essential to furthering the ADA’s purpose “to invoke the  
27  
28

sweep of congressional authority . . . to address the major areas of discrimination faced day-to-day by people with disabilities.” 42 U.S.C. § 12101(b)(4).

### **PARTIES**

6. Plaintiff is the United States of America.

7. Defendant Uber is a Delaware corporation with its principal place of business at 1515 3rd Street, San Francisco, California 94158. In this complaint, “Uber” refers to Uber Technologies, Inc. and any of its subsidiary companies or operationally distinct segments that are responsible for Uber’s provision of transportation services. *See* 49 C.F.R. § 37.37(f) (nondiscrimination requirements apply to any subsidiary company or operationally distinct segment of a parent company that is primarily engaged in the provision of transportation services).

8. Uber is a for-profit company that provides transportation services to individuals throughout the United States. Passengers request transportation through Uber’s mobile software application, and Uber arranges rides between passengers and a fleet of drivers.

9. While Uber does not own all the vehicles in this fleet, Uber maintains control over vehicle specifications, driver qualifications, the amount each passenger must pay, and the general ride experience for each trip.

10. As Uber and other similar providers have gained popularity over traditional taxi services as the primary option for on-demand transportation, Uber plays an important role in ensuring independence for countless people with disabilities who choose to – or simply must – rely on its services to travel.

11. Uber provides “specified public transportation services,” which the ADA defines as “transportation by . . . any [] conveyance (other than by aircraft) that provides the general public with general or special service (including charter service) on a regular and continuing basis.” 42 U.S.C. § 12181(10); *see also* 49 C.F.R. § 37.3.

12. Uber is a private entity primarily engaged in the business of transporting people, and its operations affect commerce. *See* 42 U.S.C. §§ 12181(1), (6), 12184(a) and 49 C.F.R. § 37.3.

13. Uber is a private entity that provides taxi and other transportation services that involve calling for a vehicle and a driver to take an individual to a place or places. *See* 49 C.F.R. § 37.29; *see also* 49 pt. 37, app. D § 37.29.

14. Uber provided 2.3 billion trips in the United States from 2017-2018, including more than 3.1 million individual trips per day.

#### **JURISDICTION AND VENUE**

15. This Court has jurisdiction over this action under the ADA, 42 U.S.C. § 12188(b)(1)(B), and 28 U.S.C. §§ 1331 and 1345, because it involves claims arising under federal law and is commenced by the United States.

16. The Court may grant declaratory relief and other necessary or proper relief pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 2201 and 2202, and may grant equitable relief, monetary damages, and a civil penalty pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 12188(b)(2).

17. Venue is proper in this district pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1391 because Uber operates, resides and has its principal place of business in this district, and a substantial part of the events or omissions giving rise to the claims occurred in this district.

18. Divisional Assignment. Assignment to the San Francisco or Oakland Division is proper under Civil L.R. 3-2(c) because Uber is headquartered in San Francisco and a substantial part of the events or omissions that give rise to the claims occurred therein.

#### **FACTS**

##### **Uber's Policies and Practices of Imposing Wait Time Fees on Passengers Who, Because of Disability, Require More Time to Board the Uber Vehicle**

19. In April 2016, Uber launched a new policy of charging passengers wait time fees in limited locations throughout the United States.

20. Under this policy, Uber charges wait time fees starting two minutes after the Uber vehicle arrives at the pickup location, and the fees are charged until the vehicle begins its trip.

21. Uber later expanded its policy to apply to all cities in the United States where Uber operates.

22. Uber has publicly stated that the amount of the wait time fee charged depends on the passenger's city and the category of Uber service the passenger is taking.

23. The two-minute window before which wait time fees are charged begins when Uber determines via the global positioning system, or GPS, that the driver has arrived at the pickup location.

24. Uber drivers do not have discretion related to wait time fees to indicate when they have arrived at the pick-up location.

25. Uber drivers do not have discretion to waive a wait time fee.

26. Many passengers with disabilities require more than two minutes to board or load into a vehicle for various reasons, including because they may use mobility aids and devices such as wheelchairs and walkers that need to be broken down and stored in the vehicle or because they simply need additional time to board the vehicle.

27. Passengers with disabilities who take longer than two minutes to board or load into the vehicle are charged a wait time fee regardless of the reason that it takes them longer than two minutes to begin the trip.

28. Upon request, Uber has issued wait time fee refunds to some passengers with disabilities.

29. Uber, however, has also denied wait time fee refunds to some passengers with disabilities even after being informed that the fees were charged because of their disabilities.

**Uber Discriminates Against Passengers and Potential Passengers Who, Because of Disability, Are Charged or Are Aware That They Would Be Charged Wait Time Fees**

30. Uber's policies and practices of charging wait time fees based on disability have impacted many passengers and potential passengers with disabilities throughout the country, including:

Passenger A

31. Passenger A is a 52-year-old woman who lives in Miami, Florida.

32. In 2012, Passenger A sustained spinal cord injuries that resulted in quadriplegia.

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