

Unite submission of 10 January 2023

PE1961/B: Make it a specific offence to assault, threaten or abuse a private hire or taxi driver while at work

Unite would fully support the petition to make it an offence to assault, threaten or abuse a private hire or taxi driver while at work. However we would also recommend that the petition extends its scope beyond one group of workers to other transport workers.

Unite has shown support in the past for legislation on protection of emergency workers. We also responded to the Protection of Workers (Retail and Age-Restricted Goods and Services) (Scotland) Bill in which we said that *“any assault carried out on an individual in the course of carrying out their work is simply unacceptable”....and“retail workers should be covered under a new statutory offence.”* However we did point out that we felt that the Bill had *“...too narrow a focus and would recommend extending the legislation further to cover other specific public facing roles.”*

We suggested in particular that hospitality workers, including people employed in the hospitality security industry should be included as well as bank workers and online grocery delivery drivers with Unite having anecdotal evidence of them being threatened with assault and/or verbally abused. However importantly we specifically suggested that transport workers, including taxi drivers and bus drivers were particularly vulnerable to assault and robbery with many fearful about returning to work following incidents.

Taxi drivers have provided individual experiences to Unite with one stating:

“The attack affects you mentally. After a couple of days off work you constantly assess every passenger that gets into your cab. You don’t want to go into work at night.”

More recently a taxi driver in Dundee was left with life-changing injuries that requires round the clock care and he will require long term support for the rest of his life, after being subject to an unprovoked attack.

This is unfortunately devastatingly real life experiences for some of those working in the taxi industry; both private hire and taxi drivers.

Similar experiences have been faced by our members in other areas of the transport sector. Assaults and abuse directed at bus drivers has increased exponentially in the past decade and during the Covid pandemic our members regularly received abuse and threats of violence. They have also been subject to physical assault and robbery this is especially evident while driving in remote locations, leaving those workers traumatized.

Train guards and ticket collectors face similar abuse while carrying out their work.

Public facing workers appear to be fair game for mindless thugs and those set on carrying out abuse, assault or other act of violence perpetrated at someone for simply doing their job.

Unite would support the petition however would ask that the petitioner considers extending this to all transport workers.