

Teamsters To Organize California Uber Drivers Association

Drivers will organize an association in California, supported by the Teamsters Joint Council 7 and a coalition of labor advocates known as Silicon Valley Rising.

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Drivers protest outside Uber headquarters following rate cuts earlier this year. Caroline O'Donovan / BuzzFeed News

On Thursday, Uber agreed to support a drivers' association as part of [a \\$100 million settlement](#) of two class action lawsuits brought against it. On Friday, the Teamsters and coalition of labor groups called Silicon Valley Rising said they would [take the the ride-hailing company up on that offer](#).

In a [press release](#), the Teamsters Joint Council 7 promised to throw its “institutional resources and power” behind driver efforts to organize into the as-of-yet unnamed California association with a goal of developing “a path toward disputing issues, hours and safety requirements, benefits, legal assistance, and training normally afforded to traditional union members.”

The misclassification [lawsuit settlement](#), reached Thursday — but not yet approved, spans a class of about 385,000 drivers in California and Massachusetts. It's not yet clear how many drivers in either state are interested in joining a union.

According to prior statements by Uber, over half of drivers drive less than ten hours a week, making it unlikely that driving for Uber is their primary form of employment. Teamsters VP Rome Aloise said the fluctuations in the number of active drivers working on any given day is just one of the challenges ride-hail workers face when it comes to organizing. Aloise says the next step for the Teamsters is to reach out to Uber itself and open a dialogue with the \$68 billion company. “It's an evolving situation,” Aloise told BuzzFeed News.

The settlement, which guaranteed some changes in Uber's policy, failed to achieve the claimants' primary goal of reclassifying drivers as employees. As contractors, Uber drivers don't legally have the ability to join a union, per the National Labor Relations Board. But, ride-hail drivers won the right to collectively bargain in Seattle [in December](#), and similar legislation is [gaining traction](#) in California's state capital. Additionally, earlier this week, the NLRB [issued a complaint](#) regarding misclassification that made it clear the issue will be increasingly high-priority for them. (Neither the policy changes nor laws regarding organizing pertain to Uber drivers outside the United States.)

“As a transportation union, the Teamsters have a long history of dealing with drivers who are classified as independent contractors,” said Rome Aloise, Vice-President of the Teamsters and President of Joint Council 7, in a statement. “Whether it’s a voice at work, better benefits, or advocacy, this association will raise standards for Uber drivers.”

Elsewhere, other unions have made attempts unionizing Uber drivers. In New York, competition between the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers and the International Association of Machinists over which will represent LaGuardia airport-based drivers (and collect their dues) actually resulted in a [formal dispute](#) at The National Labor Relations Board. In New Orleans, The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees has been [working to organize drivers](#), while in Florida, the Service Employees International Union has been active on the issue.

In an email, National Employment Law Project Deputy Director Rebecca Smith also cited the work of App-Based Drivers’ Association in Southern California, New Jersey and Washington, as well as the New York Taxi Workers Alliance. “Lots can be done outside the NLRA context,” she told BuzzFeed News. “And, of course, laws can change.”

Uber declined a request for comment on this story. In a statement issued on Thursday, the company said it would be willing to discuss issues with a drivers’ association or committee.

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