

A break for ride-hailing

Suffolk tables moratorium on rider services and addresses pet stores

BY DAVID M. SCHWARTZ
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A proposed moratorium on ride-hailing services such as Uber and Lyft was tabled Tuesday night, as more than a dozen drivers told Suffolk lawmakers that ending the service would hurt their incomes and riders who have come to depend on them.

At the county's general meeting in Riverhead, Legis. Bridget Fleming (D-Noyack) said she hopes the state budget will give local governments a portion of the \$24 million in revenue from the 4 percent state surcharge on ride-hailing, and add tougher background checks for drivers.

Fleming had introduced a bill for a six-month moratorium as a way for the county to gain leverage to help fund public bus service. Suffolk County reduced funding for the bus service as part of ongoing budget cuts.

"The county had no chance to weigh in before it was really forced by the state to allow it" or opt out altogether, Fleming said of ride-hailing services. However, she said she wanted the drivers to be "reassured their income is not in jeopardy today."

Uber drivers said the service introduced last year has provided them with vital income and serves residents more reliably than traditional

taxis or Long Island's public bus system.

"Passengers say they can't rely on buses, they can't rely on taxis," said Uber driver Wayne Parsons of Glen Cove. "Why on earth would you write a bill like this? All of us drivers would lose our jobs. People use the ride share not just to get to work, we take old people to hospitals. A lot of people are being helped here."

But taxi drivers and members of the Long Island Limousine Association said ride-hailing services should have to abide by the same background checks and insurance rules as they do. "It's an unfair playing field," said Steve Showtime, president of the limousine association and owner of Showtime Limo in Island Park.

Uber spokeswoman Danielle Filson said there are 7,000 Suffolk Uber drivers who serve 60,000 passengers regularly. She said the company "thanks the Suffolk County Legislature for listening to the thousands of Long Island drivers and tens of thousands of Long Island drivers who depend on our app to earn income and get around."

Also Tuesday, dozens of pet store owners and animal rescue groups clashed for over four hours over a bill to regulate where pet stores get animals.

The bill, sponsored by Legis. Monica Martinez (D-Brent-



Melissa McClellan, an advocate for pet rescue, speaks Tuesday.

wood) and Legis. Tom Cilmi (R-Bay Shore), would ban pet stores from buying puppies from brokers who help stores find dogs from breeders across the United States. The measure also would require longer quarantine times and increase disclosure of where the dogs come from.

In exchange, the bill would allow stores to buy from "hobby breeders," defined as facilities with fewer than four breeding females. Suffolk lawmakers had banned stores from buying from the small breeders in 2016, in an effort to prevent sick puppies from being sold at pet stores.

Pet store owners said brokers provide an additional layer of protection and regulation to ensure puppies are healthy and bred in good conditions.

But animal-resource groups said brokers allow pet store owners to be ignorant of the breeding conditions at locations they label puppy mills.

Melissa McClellan, a board member of Posh Pets Rescue in Long Beach, said sourcing of puppies would improve "if pet store owners went and saw the conditions of these animals."

Martinez said some stores are selling sick dogs and not providing proper health records.

Services for foreign language speakers criticized

BY DAVID M. SCHWARTZ
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Foreign language speakers phoning Suffolk County offices last year were hung up on, laughed at, and, in the case of one participant, called a derogatory name and told to go back to her country, advocates told legislators Tuesday as they considered a bill mandating translation services at county offices.

Advocates speaking Spanish and Urdu made the "test" calls last year after non-English speakers complained they were turned away from accessing county services, including fil-

ling police reports and applying for social service benefits.

The bill would codify into law a 2012 executive order issued by County Executive Steve Bellone that requires county agencies to provide access to a translation phone service for non-English speakers, and translate key documents into six languages.

"It is disturbing this was signed in 2012 and we're not in full compliance," said Cheryl Keshner, coordinator for the Long Island Language Advocates Coalition and community advocate of the Central Islip-based Empire Justice Center. The bill would also expand the

language-access requirements to other countywide elected officials, including the Suffolk Sheriff's office, which runs the jail.

She said group members made 88 calls from August to December, asking basic questions of how to access services. The calls frequently went to voicemail without non-English language instructions. They were answered by a person 52 times; connected to a language line 14 times, and directed to bilingual staff on 16 occasions. The other 22 times, the callers did not receive services, Keshner said.

In an August call to the Suf-

folk police department's 7th Precinct, one woman asked in Spanish the time of the next community meeting. The person who answered called the woman an expletive and told her to go back to her own country, said Dulce Rojas, eastern Suffolk community organizer for SEPA Mujer, which provides immigration services for women who are victims of assault and domestic violence.

County Executive spokesman Jason Elan said Bellone supports the legislation and "will work with her to expand all aspects of this program, including training and public awareness."

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CORRECTION

The Dow Jones industrial average rose 336.70 points to 24,876.76 on Monday. Crude oil rose \$1.32 per barrel, closing at \$62.57. The figures were incorrect in a chart in Tuesday's business section.

THIS DATE IN HISTORY

1850 In a three-hour speech to the U.S. Senate, Daniel Webster of Massachusetts endorsed the Compromise of 1850 as a means of preserving the Union.

1926 The first successful trans-Atlantic radio-telephone conversations took place between New York and London.

1936 Adolf Hitler ordered his troops to march into the Rhineland, thereby breaking the Treaty of Versailles and the Locarno Pact.

1945 During World War II, U.S. forces crossed the Rhine at Remagen, Germany, using the damaged but still usable Ludendorff Bridge.

1955 The first TV production of the musical "Peter Pan" starring Mary Martin aired on NBC.

1965 A march by civil rights demonstrators was violently broken up at the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, by state troopers and a sheriff's posse in what came to be known as "Bloody Sunday."

1967 The musical "You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown," based on the "Peanuts" comic strips by Charles M. Schulz, opened in Greenwich Village.