

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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PRESS RELEASE

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SAFE Supports Thumbs Up!
Rape Prevention is Everyone's Business
Kelly White—CEO, The SAFE Alliance

Just over 1,000 sexual assaults were reported in Travis County last year. A recent Texas Statewide Sexual Assault Prevalence Study, conducted by the Institute on Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault at the School of Social Work at UT Austin, found that only 9.2 percent of sexual assault victims in Texas reported their experiences to the police.

If Travis County is experiencing assaults at the same prevalence rate as the rest of the State, then it is likely that more than 10,000 sexual assaults really happened last year across our community. A number we can't afford to ignore.

And it's because we can't ignore sexual assault that Austin is now the site of a ridesharing debate that has been raging over the last several months. We have become involved with this debate because of the young women we are seeing that report to us they were sexually assaulted by their ridesharing drivers. Here are the facts: The SAFE Alliance (SAFE), a partnership between SafePlace and Austin Children's Shelter, operates the Forensic Nursing and Advocacy Program (FNAP), which provides rape exams for sexual assault survivors in Central Texas.

In the words of one of our forensic nurses, "I have taken care of about a thousand people in the immediate aftermath of sexual assault and have reviewed hundreds of medical forensic charts. I am now seeing a pattern of rape reports that all involve ridesharing and it is of extreme concern to me." Our staff that work with FNAP tell us they are seeing too many sexual assault survivors that report being attacked by their ridesharing drivers, at a rate of one per month in our offices.

And that's just the people we see, which is not nearly everyone. Some go to other organizations, some go to the police, and sadly many go nowhere at all.

We think that one is still too many. But if the percentage of women who are sexually assaulted by rideshare drivers is the same as the rest of Texas, then we're looking at a lot more than one a month. Unfortunately, ridesharing provides predators with easy access to vulnerable populations. We became involved in this debate because of the women, mostly young, usually under the influence, who leave a bar, concert, restaurant or party late at night, alone, and get into a car with a stranger, believing they are safe, and making the responsible choice, only to be sexually assaulted by their driver, usually at her home.

**stop abuse for
everyone**

These women have come to us for an exam and support. They are frightened; their rapist knows where they live. They are ashamed because they have been told by too many, including community leaders, that they shouldn't have been under the influence; they should have known better. They have been told it is their fault, rather than the fault of the person who raped them.

We believe that Mayor Adler's new initiative is the best option available for safe ridesharing in our community. The Thumbs Up! incentives provide for a voluntary biometric check (fingerprinting), easily accessible to all rideshare participants and with meaningful incentives to drivers and riders to participate in the program.

We believe that a voluntary fingerprinting program, crucially at scale, coupled with a broad-based, ongoing public education campaign about SAFE Rides, can be a significant deterrent, a belief supported by many of our law enforcement partners.

Sexual predators look for places they can slip in undetected with easy access to people who are vulnerable. We must provide real deterrents for predators that have made Austin and ridesharing their hunting grounds.

You should also know that our Police Chief has told us that fingerprint validation assists in post-incident investigations. When a woman decides to go to the police, we want her and the City to have every advantage in pursuit of punishment under the law.

This City is lucky to have a lot of really smart, passionate and creative leaders who have come together to work toward the best solution for keeping Uber and Lyft operating in our community while also working toward ensuring SAFE Rides.

There is no panacea. We're going to stay vocal, and stay active. Ultimately, our goal is that every ride, drink, elevator, parking garage, home, car, trail and street is safe and that rape prevention is everyone's business.

Please join me in supporting Mayor Adler. Thumbs Up! Austin is the right solution. But please also remain firm that a voluntary program that does not achieve scale is not a successful one. Wide adoption and broad education must follow.

Kelly White, CEO
The SAFE Alliance