

Worcester Chamber of Commerce, drivers discuss future of rideshare and delivery apps

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PUBLISHED 5:23 PM ET Mar. 03, 2023

WORCESTER, Mass. - Delivery and rideshare apps like DoorDash, Uber and Lyft have become a convenient part of many people's everyday lives, but discussions about the future of these services and about the people who drive for them are a bit more complicated.

App-based delivery and rideshare drivers are independent contractors, but last year, a proposed state ballot question for the November election to protect this classification was struck down by the Massachusetts Supreme Court. In its wake, there's still plenty of questions about what should be done going forward, which is why the Worcester Chamber of Commerce invited drivers, elected officials and other stakeholders in on Friday for a conversation about the future of the industry.

"How do we maintain flexibility while also ensuring these workers and drivers are protected?" said chamber President & CEO Tim Murray. "Paid a fair wage, but also have some benefits to fall back on?"

The Massachusetts Coalition for Independent Work supports two [bills](#) introduced this session in the state legislature to provide drivers with new benefits like paid sick time and a retirement account while keeping them as independent contractors.

Other groups like the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, are opposed to drivers remaining independent because they believe companies like Uber and Lyft are exploiting the classification and denying workers the benefits they deserve.

Drivers present at Friday's meeting said they're most concerned with being able to continue working on their own time.

"I'm 28, a single mom of two kids, a five year-old and a seven year-old," said Dignamar Figueroa. "I go to school full time at Quinsigamond Community College. I would not be able to be doing it alone if it wasn't because of DoorDash."

Luis Ramos said he's been driving for Lyft to help pay for his girlfriend's medical bills after she was diagnosed with lupus.

"I just want to take care of her because I'm in love with that woman, and thanks to Lyft, I can do that," Ramos said. "If it was in another type of job, I can't do that, they'd fire you, what are you doing? Why are you leaving? You're supposed to be here, you know?"

Murray hopes some progress and compromise will come out of this legislative session for the benefit of drivers.

"We've got to look at things differently, the kind of worker-employer relationship doesn't always fit what's happening with technology and utilization," Murray said. "That's what the conversation is about,

it's a good conversation, but I think reasonable minds can see that we need to find that balance and I think that can be done."