

# Another New York City taxi driver commits suicide due to financial ruin

Sandy English  
26 March 2018

On March 16, New York City yellow cab taxi driver Nicanor Ochisor, 65, hanged himself at his home in Maspeth, Queens because of financial distress. He was the fourth taxi/livery driver to commit suicide in the New York area in as many months because of impoverishment brought about by the deregulation of e-hailing services such as Uber.

Ochisor was the first yellow cab medallion owner to take his life over the growth of poverty conditions among taxi and livery drivers. Medallions were coveted licenses that permitted a person to own and lease a yellow cab taxi in New York City. Many are owned by small operators who drive their cars and who may also lease them to another driver. Other medallions are owned by large companies.

After immigrating to the United States from Romania, Ochisor purchased his medallion in 1989. He was able to finance his home mortgage with it and earn a decent living for his family.

In 2014, before the city permitted e-hailing taxi services such as Uber, a medallion could cost as much as \$1 million. Since then, Uber, Lyft and other companies have swarmed the city with nearly 100,000 vehicles, and medallions now go for as little as \$175,000.

Ochisor did not rent out his cab but did share driving duties with his wife. A longtime friend, Dan Nitescu told the *New York Daily News*, “His wife was driving in the morning, he was driving in the afternoon to midnight. Since Uber came to town ... the whole taxi business was almost destroyed. The medallion value went to almost zero.

“For the last six, seven months that whatever he makes together with his wife, he was making by himself alone, before the Uber ... He was making the payments, but it was very hard. He struggled himself. It

was bothering him all the time.”

In February, livery driver Douglas Schifter, a prominent voice in the industry, killed himself with a shotgun outside the gates of City Hall. He wrote in his suicide note: “The government is continuing its strong drive to enslave us with low wages and extreme fines. It’s a nightmare, and one can’t help but wonder: When will this stop?”

In December, livery driver Danilo Castillo also wrote a suicide note about the “disastrous” state of the industry before jumping off the roof of his apartment building in Manhattan because he was facing a crippling fine for picking up fares who hailed him on the street. A fourth driver killed himself in February, according to the New York Taxi Workers Alliance. His name has not been released.

The living standards of drivers who work for taxi and livery services have fallen precipitously since the introduction of ride-hailing apps. Uber has made a concerted effort to buy politicians and lobby for the deregulation of the industry in cities across the United States.

The result has been to turn car transportation workers into casual labor, working without benefits and for low wages. The distress of these workers, both those working for companies such as Uber and Lyft as well as those taxi and limousine drivers, who are being displaced by deregulated e-hailing services, is only one of the sharpest expressions of the broad attack on the working class aimed at destroying the rights to decent working conditions, wages and benefits which were won in the last century.



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