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## **Battle Intensifies Over Ride-Sharing in Seattle.**

**Supporters of Seattle's ride-service companies submitted more than 36,000 signatures to place a referendum on the November ballot to block new regulations that would have limited the number of cars they operate in the city.**

Supporters of Seattle's ride-service companies Thursday submitted more than 36,000 signatures — twice the number needed — to place a referendum on the November ballot to block new regulations that would have limited the number of cars they operate in the city.

Backers of the new services — which includes Lyft, Uber and Sidecar — say the flood of signatures reflects strong public support and alarm that the new City Council ordinance would have restricted access to the popular, mobile-app-summoned alternative to taxis.

"The fact that we were able to gather more than double the required number of signatures in such a short time shows that Seattle voters clearly want to have a conversation about this issue," said Brad Harwood, spokesman for Keep Seattle's Ride Options Coalition.

By filing the petitions, the companies prevent a limit of 150 drivers each on the road at one time from going into effect. But the action also suspends requirements on safety, driver training and insurance that made up the bulk of the City Council ordinance approved March 17 and scheduled to kick in Friday.

The city could still enforce existing taxi and for-hire laws that make ride-services illegal, something City Attorney Pete Holmes declined to do while the City Council was formulating new rules over the past year.

Seattle Mayor Ed Murray, who opposed setting limits on the number of ride-service vehicles, said the mobile-app, taxi and for-hire companies have agreed to a 45-day negotiation period in which to try to work out rules for their continued operations.

In the meantime, Murray said, the city Finance and Administrative Services Department will develop enforcement guidelines.

The ride-service companies say they recognize the need for city policies governing their operations.

"We look forward to working with the mayor and the city to find a workable solution," Harwood said.

Murray held out hope earlier in the week that he could reach an agreement that would keep the referendum off the ballot. But a lawyer for the companies said that once submitted, referendums can't be withdrawn.

"Once they're filed, they're filed," said James Greenfield, an attorney with the Seattle firm, Davis, Wright, Tremaine.

He said the City Council could refer a revised ordinance to the ballot to compete with the ride-service referendum.

A citizen's initiative is also in the works. One filed last month would limit the number of ride-service drivers and add that they could not work while under the influence of marijuana. No signatures have been gathered for that measure.

The City Council adopted the ride-service regulations after an outcry from taxi and for-hire drivers who said the new companies weren't subject to the same strict rules about numbers and safety. Seattle limits the taxi industry to 688 vehicle licenses and hasn't increased the number since 1990.

Councilmember Tom Rasmussen said he opposed putting caps on the ride-service companies, but said the provisions on vehicle inspections, driver training and insurance were important for customer safety.

"The services are very popular. They've been very well received. The caps we put on them were arbitrary," he said.

But he questioned why the referendum didn't just repeal the caps and leave the safety provisions in place.

"Seems like that would make them concerned, to be operating without any local regulations, the potential for liability and the potential for the city to shut them down. I think they would be motivated to reach some agreement," Rasmussen said.

Under the Seattle City Charter, 16,510 registered voter signatures, or 8 percent of the total number of votes cast in the last mayoral election, are required to qualify a citizens referendum for the ballot.

After initial inspection by the City Clerk, the petitions will be delivered to King County Elections for signature verification.

Information from The Seattle Times archives was included in this report.

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