

MHA Today

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Taxi Commission Forms a Healthcare Committee

by MHA president Carl Macmurdo

A committee to establish guidelines for a health insurance program that would be available to all drivers held its first public hearing at San Francisco City Hall on Oct. 17, 2006. The committee members were appointed by the San Francisco Taxi Commission (TC) at its September 12 meeting. After nine hearings that will wind up in February of 2007, the committee will issue its findings and recommendations to the SF Board of Supervisors by April 1, 2007.

- Taxi Commissioner **Tom Oneto**, who holds the TC's labor seat, serves as committee chair;
- Taxi Commission President **Paul Gillespie**, the non-medallion holding drivers' representative;
- **Ruach Graffis** of the United Taxi Workers (UTW) also representing non-medallion holding drivers;
- **Brian Browne**, an economist selected by the San Francisco Taxi Association (SFTA) to represent the interests of cab company owners;
- **Dennis Korkos**, secretary of the Medallion Holders Association (MHA) representing medallion holder interests.

The committee originally included John Lazar, president and general manager of Luxor Cab, as the management representative. After serving for one month, Lazar resigned on his attorney's advice when the UTW filed a lawsuit alleging gate overcharges against Luxor Cab and three other companies.

Brian Browne, the SFTA's choice to replace Lazar, was expected to be approved by the Taxi Commission at its November 28 meeting.

MHA asked Dennis Korkos, Yellow owner/driver, about his role and what might be the end results of the committee's efforts.



Dennis Korkos represents MHA on the Taxi Commission's Healthcare Committee

"I will oppose any recommendation that requires medallion holders or taxi companies to pay for the health benefits of drivers who are defined as independent contractors," Korkos said. "One possible alternative is to secure an HMO policy at a group rate - that drivers would pay for themselves - yet at lower cost than if the drivers purchased coverage as individuals."

The City Attorney's office has opined that any contribution required of taxi companies or medallion holders would be construed as a special tax, thereby necessitating a ballot measure for approval. This opinion appears in a March 2006 report jointly issued by the San Francisco Department of Public Health and the city-sponsored San Francisco Health Plan.

The report is titled, "Establishing a San Francisco Taxi Driver Health Care Coverage Program: Administration, Cost, and Funding Options." It is available for viewing on the MHA website at www.medallionholders.com.

A survey designed by the Healthcare committee will be given to all taxi drivers during the upcoming "A Card" renewal period. 🚗