

New York police chiefs want ride-sharing services in upstate to help reduce drunk driving

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The head of the state Association of Chiefs of Police says ride-sharing services can help curb drunk driving. (MARK RALSTON/AFP/GETTY IMAGES)

ALBANY — The head of the state Association of Chiefs of Police is calling on Gov. Cuomo to expand ride-sharing services like Uber and Lyft to upstate to curb drunk driving. In a letter to Cuomo, Cheektowaga Police Chief David Zack wrote that upstate accounts for 51% of all licensed drivers in New York, but 65% of alcohol- and drug-impaired arrests and 59% of all fatal and personal injury crashes.

The percentages are significantly lower in New York City, which offers an array of ridesharing and mass transit options that upstate does not, Zack wrote. "Drunk driving is a fatal problem, and this legislation offers a promising solution. It's that simple," wrote Zack, calling it a public safety issue.

"The New York State Association of Chiefs of Police strongly urge you to prioritize, champion and pass a bill that would allow ridesharing throughout New York State in the next legislative session," Zack wrote. Cuomo has supported the concept and recently urged upstate residents to pressure their local state lawmakers on the issue.

Cuomo had previously said he would seek statewide regulations of the ride-sharing industry. But when that didn't happen, the industry this year pushed for some changes to insurance law that would allow Uber and Lyft to expand to upstate cities.

But the Senate and Assembly couldn't come to agreement.

Sources said the powerful state trial lawyers, who are close to the Assembly Democrats, were pushing to require more comprehensive insurance coverage.

Supporters say they are optimistic the Legislature will act in 2017.

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