

December 29, 2025

**OFFICE OF THE HEARING EXAMINER
KING COUNTY, WASHINGTON**
Telephone (206) 477-0860
hearingexaminer@kingcounty.gov
www.kingcounty.gov/independent/hearing-examiner

REPORT AND DECISION

SUBJECT: King County For-Hire Licensing file no. 25684

WOLD AINALEM
For-Hire Driver Enforcement Appeal

For Hire no.: 11211

Appellant: **Wold Ainalem**
[REDACTED]
Everett, WA 98208

Telephone: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

King County: King County For-Hire Licensing
represented by **Elizabeth Stenson**
King County For-Hire Licensing
201 S. Jackson Street Suite 206
Seattle, WA 98104
Telephone: (206) 263-2882
Email: elizabeth.stenson@kingcounty.gov

Overview

1. After hearing the parties' testimony, reviewing the exhibits, and considering the relevant law, Mr. Ainalem's appeal is denied but the civil penalty is reduced from \$125 to \$75.

Procedural Background

2. On August 26, 2025, King County For-Hire Licensing (Licensing) issued Citation 25684 to Wold Ainalem. Ex. D2. Mr. Ainalem filed a timely appeal on September 5. Ex. D4.
3. We went to hearing on December 17. Participating in the hearing were: Elizabeth Stenson representing Licensing, and appellant Wold Ainalem.

Appeal Issues

Per the Notice of Hearing, the issues identified for consideration on appeal are as follows:

4. Whether Mr. Ainalem's August 26, 2025, citation for failing to activate his taximeter (KCC 6.65.160.N) and the associated \$125 penalty is supported by a preponderance of the evidence and appropriate under the facts of this case.

Factual Findings

Weighing all the evidence, the hearing examiner finds the following facts by a preponderance of the evidence:

5. On August 26, 2025, Inspector Stenson was at SeaTac airport, where Licensing Inspectors were stopping every taxi in the arrivals area to address the widespread problem of for-hire drivers not activating their taximeters when taking passengers. Testimony of Stenson.
6. Mr. Ainalem was dropping off passengers at the arrival gate when Inspector Stenson approached his taxi. She asked him if he had run his taximeter for the fare he just completed. Mr. Ainalem said he did not, because the trip was a flat rate from Pier 91 to the airport. Testimony of Stenson; Testimony of Ainalem. She informed Mr. Ainalem that he was required to activate the taximeter for every trip and that she would be citing him for failure to do so. Ex. D2-002.
7. Mr. Ainalem explained that his new smart taximeter tablet had not been inspected and approved for use and his older Centrodyne taximeter does not have the ability to select a "flat fare." Testimony of Ainalem; Ex. D3-002.
8. Ms. Stenson clarified that the Purple taxi company that Mr. Ainalem was driving for was no longer approved to use the Centrodyne taximeters and that Mr. Ainalem should have been using the newer smart taximeter tablet. Testimony of Stenson.
9. At the hearing, Mr. Ainalem acknowledged that he did not have his tablet taximeter activated on August 29, but expressed more philosophical concerns with the code requirement. He testified that he did not overcharge the passengers, that the flat rate is only applied if requested by the customer, if the customer wants a receipt they pay by

credit card, and the flat rate frequently results in less profit for the driver than if the meter were running. He attributed the failure to have an operational smart taximeter to the “new” Purple taxi company that had not yet made the tablets operational with its drivers. Mr. Ainalem opined that driver’s shouldn’t be penalized where they aren’t getting any advantage by offering the customer a flat fare.

10. Inspector Stenson emphasized that the reason for requiring that the taximeter be activated for every ride, even flat fares, is to enable the dispatcher to have accurate and complete documentation of trips provided by their drivers. Testimony of Stenson.

Conclusions of Law

11. The hearing examiner has jurisdiction pursuant to KCC 20.22.040.
12. Licensing bears the burden of proving by a preponderance of evidence both the violation and the appropriateness of the remedy it has imposed. KCC 20.22.080.G; .210.B. We do not grant substantial weight or otherwise accord deference to agency determinations. Exam. R. XV.F.3.
13. A preponderance of the evidence supports Licensing’s issuance of a citation for Mr. Ainalem’s failure to activate his taximeter on August 26, 2025, in violation of KCC 6.65.160.N. All permitted for-hire drivers are responsible for knowing and complying with the regulations and policies that apply to their permit. Mr. Ainalem had been a for-hire driver for many years and was, or should have been, aware of the requirement to activate his taximeter for every trip, even flat rate fares.
14. The \$125 civil penalty is consistent with the code provisions for a "Class A" monetary penalty and is appropriate for the violation. KCC 6.65.430.A.1. Licensing could have cited Mr. Ainalem for not having a tablet taximeter and not having it inspected for use in a timely manner. But he was only issued a citation for KCC 6.65.160.N, for failing to activate the meter. Inspector Stenson also acknowledged that Licensing chose to use -.160.N (a \$125 penalty) instead of -.160.H (a \$250 penalty) for its enforcement program on this regulation in recognition of how widespread the problem was and its belief that a \$125 penalty would be adequate to change driver behavior.
15. While there were potential higher penalties, it is also possible that, had there not been a comprehensive enforcement effort on this regulatory requirement on August 26, Mr. Ainalem would have been given a warning instead of a \$125 fine. Mr. Ainalem’s testimony was credible, and he raised some salient concerns about the transition between the older meter system and the new smart taximeters with respect to flat fares. Under these circumstances a reduction in the penalty is appropriate.

DECISION:

1. Mr. Ainalem’s civil penalty is reduced to \$75 and the remainder of his appeal is DENIED.

ORDERED December 29, 2025.



Devon Shannon
Hearing Examiner

NOTICE OF RIGHT TO APPEAL

King County Code 20.22.040 directs the Examiner to make the County’s final decision for this type of case. This decision shall be final and conclusive unless appealed to superior court in accordance with Ch. 7.16 RCW. It is the responsibility of the party seeking to appeal the examiner’s decision to determine and meet the legal requirements for filing an appeal.

MINUTES OF THE DECEMBER 17, 2025, HEARING IN THE APPEAL OF WOLD AINALEM, KING COUNTY FOR-HIRE LICENSING FILE NO. 25684

Devon Shannon was the Hearing Examiner in this matter. A verbatim recording of the hearing is available in the Hearing Examiner’s Office.

The following exhibits were offered by the department and entered into the record:

Exhibit no. D1	King County For-Hire Licensing staff report
Exhibit no. D2	Citation, issued August 26, 2025
Exhibit no. D3	Contact Documentation
Exhibit no. D4	Appeal, received September 5, 2025

December 29, 2025

**OFFICE OF THE HEARING EXAMINER
KING COUNTY, WASHINGTON**
Telephone (206) 477-0860
hearingexaminer@kingcounty.gov
www.kingcounty.gov/independent/hearing-examiner

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

SUBJECT: King County For-Hire Licensing file no. **25684**

WOLD AINALEM
For-Hire Driver Enforcement Appeal

I, Lauren Olson, certify under penalty of perjury under the laws of the State of Washington that I transmitted the **REPORT AND DECISION** to those listed on the attached page as follows:

- EMAILED to all County staff listed as parties/interested persons and parties with e-mail addresses on record.
- placed with the United States Postal Service, through Quadient-Impress, with sufficient postage, as FIRST CLASS MAIL in an envelope addressed to the non-County employee parties/interested persons to addresses on record.

DATED December 29, 2025.



Lauren Olson
Legislative Secretary

Ainalem, Wold

Hardcopy

Bailey, Kendall

Finance and Admin Svcs, Consumer Protection Div

Cantu, Eddie

King County For-Hire Licensing

City of Seattle Hearing Examiner

Megow, John

Finance and Admin Svcs, Consumer Protection Div

Newhouse, Cregan

Finance and Admin Svcs, Consumer Protection Div

Stenson, Elizabeth

King County For-Hire Licensing

Taylor, Tyson

King County For-Hire Licensing