Senator Eric Coleman
Representative Brendan Sharkey
Co-Chairs, Planning and Development Committee
Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106

February 17, 2009

Dear Legislation Committee:

I am submitting written testimony to whole-heartedly support the passage of Red Light Camera Legislation HB 5522. As a medical student at Yale School of Medicine in New Haven, I have been impacted greatly by the death of my fellow student, Mila Rainof, last April. Mila was crossing South Frontage Road at York Street, directly in front of Yale-New Haven Hospital. There was a truck pulling out of the loading dock into the intersection. Her walk cycle time ran out, so she started to run. A small black car, whose view was blocked by two SUVs in the adjacent lanes, accelerated as its signal turned green. Mila did not see the car that hit her as she approached the curb, and she landed on her head.

Like many, I was impacted by Mila's gigantic smile, warmth, and energy while she was living. She was about to graduate medical school and begin a career in emergency medicine. She would have had the opportunity to help countless people, and we are all worse off without her. I am sad for her family, friends, our Yale med community, her boyfriend who had to start his residency in California without her, and the many people who would have been healed by her warmth, intelligence and skill as her patients.

I think about Mila often as I cross the Frontage Road and York intersections nearly every day as I walk to the medical school and hospital. South Frontage Road at this juncture is basically a four-lane on-ramp to the Route 34 Connector, leading to I-95 and I-91. North Frontage Road is the off-ramp. Nearly every time I cross, multiple drivers run the yellow and red lights at the end of the cycle. Since many of these drivers make this commute everyday, they know that the pedestrian cycle follows the green light, so they do not need to worry about on-coming traffic from York Street colliding with them. Traveling in their steel cages, drivers do not seem bothered that patients, hospital employees and students are waiting to cross to get to and from the hospital. The combination of rushed pedestrians and impatient rush-hour drivers is deadly.

This is just one poignant example of an intersection in which red light cameras can potentially save lives. I can think of many others in New Haven and throughout Connecticut. City police are too over-extended to be responsive to our calls for higher levels of enforcement. They have little incentive to catch red-light runners because most of the funding raised by tickets for moving violations goes directly to the state. Red light cameras, implemented so effectively in states like New York and New Jersey, are a simple solution to change the culture of reckless driving in our state.

This bill is not only about Mila. Nor is it about 11-year-old Gabrielle Lee, who was killed by a car on Whalley Avenue only six weeks after Mila died. It is about all the people of New Haven and Connecticut whose lives will be made healthier, calmer, and safer with streets that reflect our values. As a medical student whose research focuses on childhood obesity, I am keenly aware of how unsafe streets contribute to sedentary lifestyles. Communities designed solely for cars make it much more difficult for people to walk and cycle for everyday transportation needs. Recent studies using objective measures of total physical activity have found that residents of high-walkable neighborhoods get one hour more of physical activity each week and are 2.4 times more likely to meet physical activity recommendations than residents of low-walkable neighborhoods.[1]

During clinical encounters, I have heard many adolescents tell me that their parents force them to stay inside with their televisions, video games and snacks. While crime is a major reason for their parents' fears, children are actually more likely to be hurt by cars than by crime. Motor vehicle collisions are the leading cause of death for all people ages 2 through 34. In addition, streets where there are more people walking and cycling might lead to a reduction in crime and a greater sense of security.

Since I have become involved in Elm City Cycling, the Yale Medical Campus Traffic Safety Group and the New Haven Safe Streets Coalition, I have had many discussions with members of the medical and public health community about the importance of designing streets that are safe for pedestrians and cyclists. The health benefits are clear: reduction of traffic-related injuries and deaths, as well as improved fitness due to greater walkability and safer cycling. Passing Red Light Camera Legislation for Connecticut is an important step to prevent needless deaths, and improve the health and quality of life of our population.

Sincerely,

Erica Mintzer

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[1] Sallis et al. "The role of built environments in physical activity, eating, and obesity in childhood." *The future of children*. 2006 vol:16 iss:1 pg:89-108.