

To: Committee on Public Safety

From: Gary Fredericks,  
Driver Training Instructor,  
Connecticut Police Academy

Subject: Creation of a state driver training facility for law enforcement

Date: March 03, 2009

I am writing in support of Bill No. 6562, regarding the creation of a state wide driver training facility for law enforcement officers in Connecticut. I would ask that serious consideration be given to the creation of such a facility, in spite of perceived difficult economic times or the lack of available state land.

I have been part of a team of driver training instructors who have conducted training through the Connecticut Police Academy for the past 31 years. During this time I have had the responsibility to create training conditions to simulate emergency response driving and pursuit driving. What, or how, one wants to teach to these concerns is subject to opinion. But everyone agrees that a sizeable amount of land is necessary to create maneuvering challenges and to sustain speeds typical of this type of driving.

Currently, the driver training facility at the Academy is approximately 90 feet wide by 500 feet in length. This space is so small that, by necessity, the types and amounts of training are limited in scope, number and diversity. This space has always been much too small to contemplate any type of emergency response or pursuit training. Therefore I have had to go off site in an effort to find "borrowed facilities" which would allow me to approximate actual roadway design and real world complexity. Some of these opportunities have involved utilizing portions of Connecticut's intrastate highway system (while some of the highways were under construction) or an unused portion of Groton/New London Airport. These state owned options are no longer available. We have recently had to borrow land from Consumer's Magazine (at their test track in Colchester) and from United Technologies/Pratt and Whitney (at their unused portion of Rentschler Field.) Despite the generous and supportive offers of these two private concerns both of these facilities will not likely be available by calendar year 2011.

Before any training ideas or lesson plans can be created the driving facility must have an approved foot print from which the program can grow. The amount of acreage we have used in the past has primarily been dictated by the intended use of the property. Expressways under construction had length, but no width. Parking lots had the opposite concerns. We need a facility which will allow for multiple vehicle training as well as multiple and diverse training activities. Our observations of other states' facilities suggests a need for 50-60 acres of useable land. This amount of land would satisfy the training needs of the Connecticut State Police, municipal police departments and the Connecticut Police Academy.

Within the language of the Raised Bill, there is also mention of the 'suitable site' being centrally located. The previous sites have been in geographically remote locations such as Groton, Colchester, Trumbull and Hammonasset Beach State Park. These are not examples of central location. A site should be considered in proximity to the Police Academy in Meriden, taking advantage of classroom space, parking and security of the training vehicles. Across the street from the Academy such a site seems a possibility and is worthy of further research.

This Bill represents an opportunity to fund a project which will reduce the numbers of collisions, and associated costs and liabilities, to the entire State of Connecticut. We can create safer drivers and driving conditions, but must start with the proper training facility. One can easily see that such a facility is not only long overdue, but appears to be a future necessity. We cannot afford to step backward in the levels or amounts of training in the dangerous field of law enforcement.

Respectfully submitted,

Gary Fredericks  
Connecticut Police Academy  
285 Preston Avenue,  
Meriden, CT 06450  
203-427-2613