

Written Testimony of Deputy Chief Dale E. Call, Westport Police Department
In support of H.B. 5894

Senator DeFronzo, Representative Guerrera, Members of the Transportation Committee --
my name is Deputy Chief Dale E. Call, representing the Westport Police Department, and
I am here to testify in support of House Bill 5894, an Act Establishing a "Move Over"
Law in Connecticut.

17 law enforcement officers were struck and killed by motor vehicles in 2008. That is one
officer killed for every 10.5 seconds I have been given to speak. Since 1997, more than
180 officers have been killed by a moving car. Many more have been injured. Not only
police officers are affected -- in a five-year period from 1998 to 2003, 34 firefighters and
EMT's were killed in the same manner and over 80 injured.

No agency is immune. In 2001, a motorist failed to move over and struck the rear of a
Westport police car with its emergency lights activated. Fortunately, the officer was only
slightly injured. Two days before Christmas this past year one of our officers was injured
after when a truck failed to move over to safely pass his fully marked, fully lit police car.
Once again, the officer was lucky -- he only suffered minor injuries. We have had
countless officers injured -- some minor, some not -- after being hit standing outside their
patrol car. Damaged cars can be fixed easily. Injured police officers cannot. We've been
lucky, but good luck only goes so far. We can no longer bet on the lives of emergency
responders with nothing more than luck on our side.

The National Traffic Incident Management Coalition, made up of many groups including the Automobile club of America, the International Association of Chiefs of Police and the International Association of Fire Chiefs, supports "Move Over" laws as a means of protecting our responders. 44 states have some kind of "Move Over" law on the books. 44 states, but not Connecticut. Education can only go so far -- we need this legislation to back up any education effort, and to protect our emergency responders.

I have followed previous attempts to pass similar legislation in the past. I am aware that arguments have been raised that "move over" laws would be difficult to enforce. I have been a police officer for more than 25 years, and I have seen laws passed that are full of good intentions but are difficult, if not impossible, to enforce. This is not one of them.

We currently have seat belt laws in Connecticut to protect occupants of motor vehicles. Opponents of that law argued it would be difficult to enforce. It has not been difficult to enforce and in fact has led to increased use of seat belts. That in turn has led to fewer fatalities on our roads.

The cell phone law was passed in response to many studies that have shown their use to be dangerous to everyone on the road due to distracted driving. Law enforcement officers have had no difficulty enforcing this law, either. Legislators now have an opportunity to pass a law that will serve to protect emergency responders on our streets and highways. I am certain that a "move over" law will work.

Educating the public to pay attention to emergency vehicles and their occupants on the road can only go so far. There will always be those who will disregard any information we put out to them, no matter how well-intentioned. This is the reason we have a seat belt law, it is the reason we have a cell phone law, and it is the very reason we need a “move over” law.

Every day law enforcement officers across Connecticut support the actions this body takes by enforcing the laws you have passed. This is an opportunity to support those same law enforcement officers, indeed all emergency responders, through your actions here. I urge the members of this committee to pass House Bill 5894.