CT Red Light Camera Legislation Testimony
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Emergency Physician & Researcher

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. You may wonder why physicians are here today. Well, as an emergency physician, surgeon, and neurologist from Yale School of Medicine, we see the economic, emotional, and physical toll of motor vehicle collisions on adult and pediatric patients and their families every day. As researchers, we are particularly troubled by these injuries because copious research demonstrates that many of these events are preventable. Red light cameras are one effective solution to help decrease traffic injuries. We are here together to support the use of Red Light Cameras in Connecticut. Our views are our own and do not necessarily represent those of our institutions: Yale University, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, or the Veterans Affairs Agency.

The Connecticut Department of Health reports that unintentional motor vehicle traffic injuries were the third leading cause of injury-related emergency department (ED) visits in Connecticut from 2000 – 2004. Approximately 40,000 motor vehicle traffic injuries are brought to CT emergency departments each year. Now looking more closely at collisions occurring in intersections, the CT Department of Transportation reported that approximately 3,500 motor vehicle collisions associated with traffic control violations, of which 60% resulted in injuries in 2006. Clearly, motor vehicle collisions, particularly at intersections are a significant cause of injury to our patients here in CT.

Kate Viola, MD
Surgery Resident & Researcher

Red light camera systems are connected to traffic signals and sensors buried in the pavement at the crosswalk or stop line. The system continuously monitors the traffic signal and triggers the camera to photograph a vehicle entering the intersection after the light has turned red.

Considerable research has shown that Red light camera systems reduce red light violations and crashes. Summarizing all available studies on red light camera systems around the world, the Cochrane Review concluded that the use of red light cameras decreased the number of crashes with injuries. The best designed study showed a reduction in injury crashes of 30%. These studies show that nearby intersections may also experience reductions in crashes and

red light violations due to driver's increased awareness and cautious behavior from the nearby red light camera. ("Halo Effect")

Part of the red light camera system includes community education on the use of these cameras. Prior to implementing the cameras, advertisements in community newspapers and local television and radio stations announce the coming cameras. In addition, permanent signs are placed in the area of the intersections advising drivers that cameras are in use. These driver awareness techniques may have an additive reduction on red light violations and crashes.

Despite the clear evidence that red light cameras help prevent red light violations and subsequent injury collisions; many oppose red light cameras due to civil liberty concerns.

Michael Phipps, MD
Neurologist & Researcher

A primary concern is the privacy of the individual. Opponents argue that Red light cameras are "Big Brother," watching citizens every move. While this concern is legitimate, the Red light camera is specifically designed to capture photographic evidence of traffic law violation, not general surveillance. The camera is only triggered when vehicles enter an intersection at a red light at high speed. The camera does not provide continuous monitoring of an intersection. Furthermore, the information captured on the camera (license plate and possible driver photograph) are knowingly exposed by all driving on a public road. Legislation should be crafted carefully to protect patient privacy – camera data should only be accessible for red light violations and crash investigations; camera data should not be sold, shared or otherwise abused.

An additional concern of opponents is that vehicle owners are guilty until proven innocent. One must remember that the citation is simple a summons. The person receiving such a summons may elect to pay the fine or argue in court (or in some cases by mail) that they are not guilty of this infraction. The fundamental principle of innocence until proven guilty is maintained with this system.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak with you about red light camera use in CT. For over 10 years, cities across the United States have utilized this reliable and accurate technology to improve traffic safety. We believe legitimate civil liberties concerns can be assuaged with carefully constructed legislation to ensure Red Light Cameras are used exclusively for red light violations. The reductions in injury crashes and potential reduction in patient morbidity, mortality, and health system costs make red light cameras a valuable addition to the people of Connecticut, particularly in this time of economic instability.