

TO: CGA Transportation Committee
RE: Public Hearing on SB 149

March 2, 2009

Dear Senators and Representatives:

I would like to express my strong support for proposed legislation enabling the use of red light cameras. This legislation is crucial to economic development within Connecticut.

Red light violations are common and serious in New Haven and other towns within the region. On average, I witness drivers running red lights several times per day. My window looks over a busy intersection and I can see drivers running them at almost every cycle.

Red light running is particularly common at peak travel times, which is precisely when it presents the most risk to other road users.

Although violations may seem trivial to those breaking the law, the consequences of red light violations are extremely serious. Crashes caused by red light running are far more likely to cause an injury than those caused by other types of violations. According to one study by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, red light running was responsible for 200,000 crashes in 2005, resulting in over 150,000 injuries and over 800 deaths nationwide. This indirectly creates a significant cost burden for all citizens, in the form of high insurance and medical costs.

The economies of urban areas such as New Haven and Hamden, where I do the majority of my shopping, rely on safe pedestrian, bicycle and vehicular travel. While suburban retail areas may depend more on longer trips along high speed roads and highways, most shopping trips in New Haven involve short trips to a nearby neighborhood district. The fear of drivers running red lights discourages people from making these kinds of trips on a daily basis, which severely affects local retail sales. In addition, only a small plurality of New Haven residents rely on a private automobile to get to work, indicating that many trips to work are short in nature and involve means of transit (walking and cycling) that place workers at a potentially higher risk when confronted with drivers who are speeding or running red light signals. Based on my conversations with numerous individuals in neighborhoods across New Haven, the perceived lack of safe streets also encourages many people to drive more, rather than walk or bike, resulting in significant household expenses that might be better directed towards education, health care and other basic needs.

In other words, when it comes to people running red lights, the perception issue is at least as important as the safety issue. Although traffic safety problems cause numerous deaths and injuries, they also have significant indirect impacts on public health, education, community involvement, household savings, and economic development.

As I'm sure others will testify, red light cameras have been shown to be extremely effective at modifying driver behavior. Increased driver compliance rates have been found not just at camera-equipped sites, but at non-equipped intersections as well. In some cases, red light

violations have dropped by 90 percent or more. Additionally, the use of such cameras could help free up law enforcement resources for other quality of life issues, possibly providing significant relief to taxpayers.

Perhaps most importantly from a taxpayer's perspective in the long term, it has become clear that having walkable streets is also absolutely crucial to attracting a young, entrepreneurial workforce. Automobile use continues to drop across the world for various economic, cultural and environmental reasons. The retention of creative, productive, 25-34 year old workers is a crucial issue in Connecticut, for demographic reasons that the committee is well aware of, and is directly linked to having vibrant urban places.

Anecdotally speaking, I have worked for several small for-profit corporations which focus on development in Connecticut cities, and traffic safety is constantly cited as a concern by our employees. The perceived and actual lack of safe streets has directly prevented some of our younger and middle-aged employees from walking or biking to work on a daily basis, which means that they are less likely to enjoy living and working in an urban area.

The New Haven Safe Streets Coalition, whose petition was signed by over 2,000 city residents, over 30 elected officials, all 12 of New Haven's Community Management Teams and dozens of other local and state advocacy groups over the past nine months, has demonstrated that there is significant regional interest in improved traffic safety. The petition called for a 90% reduction in traffic injuries and fatalities by 2015 - a goal that we must meet, given that these types of injuries are completely preventable. To not do so is simply unethical. Although a multi-pronged approach is urgently needed, I believe that the coalition's stated goal of a 90% reduction in injuries would only be possible with higher levels of enforcement, including red light cameras.

I hope that you will do everything possible to support the proposed legislation, which would enable municipalities to install and effectively monitor red light cameras on our roads.

Best regards,

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