

March 3, 2010

Senator Don DeFronzo
Representative Antonio Guerrero
Co-Chairs, Senate Transportation Committee
Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106

RE: SB 345: AN ACT AUTHORIZING MUNICIPALITIES TO CONDUCT A PILOT PROGRAM FOR THE USE OF AUTOMATED TRAFFIC CONTROL SIGNAL ENFORCEMENT DEVICES AT CERTAIN INTERSECTIONS.

Dear Senator DeFronzo, Representative Guerrero and members of the Committee,

I have been living in Hamden and commuting to New Haven by bicycle for more than 22 years. I have witnessed innumerable times when motorists have run red lights in the city – with often two, three, even four vehicles rushing through an intersection after the light has turned red.

I am not alone in this. When James Lewis came to serve as police chief of New Haven for 18 months (a term that just ended), he often expressed dismay at this behavior of supposedly staid New Englanders, saying it was much more egregious than in car-crazy Los Angeles County where he'd been working in law enforcement for years.

I recently had a conversation with a six-year-old New Haven resident as we walked along a downtown sidewalk. After observing some red-light runners, we talked about what the colors on the traffic lights mean. She explained, "Red means stop; green means go; yellow means go faster." This, indeed, seems to be the rule, resulting in the breaching of the first rule (red often doesn't mean stop).

This proposed legislation would allow New Haven to conduct a pilot program that would have cameras taking photos of the license plates of vehicles that run red lights. The cameras would not photograph individuals inside the vehicles. It seems to me that if someone is breaking the law in public space on publicly-funded roads, taking a photo of that violation and sending a ticket to the person in whose name the vehicle is registered is a helpful way of curbing that illegal behavior. As Chief Lewis was the first to say, the police cannot be everywhere, and under current law an officer may only ticket a driver when he/she directly observes the violation. Having red light cameras would greatly enhance, through available technology, the police department's reach when it comes to enforcing traffic laws.

The current situation in New Haven – where pedestrians and cyclists are especially vulnerable, but where everyone in the public space is endangered to some degree – runs counter to the residents' desire to make New Haven a truly livable city, with Complete Streets that take into account the rights of all users of our public space.

I urge you to support this bill and let New Haven move forward toward this vision.

Sincerely,

Melinda Tuhus

103 Carmalt Rd.

Hamden, CT 06517

I believe strongly in the importance of red light cameras to protect the civil rights of the citizens of New Haven.

In an age when sophisticated satellite imagery can provide a clear photo of any street in America and cars drive up and down the streets taking photographs for such products as Google's "Street View", I find the objection of privacy advocates to be misleading.

Driving a vehicle is a public act in a public space. Driving is a governed act. The State has a responsibility to monitor this privilege and to deputize certain individuals to do this job.

However, it is impractical and dangerous to have police officers ticketing red light running, due to the sheer volume of violations caused, and the extreme danger the violators pose to law-abiding citizens. Do we want police officers to run red lights themselves, in order to give a hundred dollar ticket?

Video cameras have allowed police to prosecute individuals guilty of hit and run crimes, with no outcry over the supposed injustice to privacy. Every gas station and bank has a camera that shows the area outside of it--this is perfectly legal as stands.

The only thing we are asking the legislature to consider is allowing us to use cameras, which are already legal, as evidence in court for tickets. A person does have a reasonable expectation of privacy: but even more reasonable is a person's expectation to be able to live and enjoy their life.

I have yet to hear a single compelling argument for how a small photograph showing a license plate will invade anyone's privacy, considering they are driving on subsidized public owned roads.

I urge you to support this bill. I urge you to consider the consistent push from community advocacy groups who want this. In previous years you have dismissed it as a "money grab". This is disrespectful to your constituents who fight for this year after year, with no monetary gain and only loss, as we take time off from work and use our own personal income to promote this idea.

I find this tactic disappointing. Creating a straw-man and then railing against citizens with it is highly questionable behavior for an elected representative.

David Streever
Democratic Ward Co-Chair in the 96th District
Board Member, Elm City Cycling